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OF CANTON

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How Do You Help People Meet an Impending Deadline? With a Relationship.



Todd Barnhouse

CEO | Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association



The Ohio Child Care Resource and Referral Association (OCCRRA) works with the state's seven child care resource and referral agencies to ensure high-quality outcomes for all of Ohio's children and families.

OCCRRA CEO Todd Barnhouse attended the Foundation's recent Board meeting to discuss a recent OCCRRA program.

The challenge: by 2020, the state of Ohio will require all child care providers receiving public funding to be a part of the state's Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) system. Providers that don't meet SUTQ standards will no longer be eligible to serve low-income families.

The resource and referral agencies have been working hard to inform unrated providers that they need to enter SUTQ, and to help them improve their quality so that they remain eligible for public funding. **Yet 63% of Ohio's child care providers remain unrated.**

In January, with Foundation funding, OCCRRA started an innovative mentoring program that paired experienced, SUTQ-rated child care providers with unrated providers. The mentors met regularly with their mentees to coach and guide them on making the improvements necessary to be eligible for SUTQ.

The pilot has funded 60 mentoring relationships across the state. The mentees have responded very favorably; one mentee called the program a "lifesaver" and "the best thing to date."

There were benefits on both sides of the mentoring relationship: the mentees received the guidance and support they needed to make the required quality improvements, and each mentor and mentee received incentive funding and accrued ten professional development credits for participating in the program (each provider needs 20 professional development credits every two years). By the end of the year, all participating mentees should have applied to enter SUTQ

Todd considers the pilot a resounding success. "The expensive part has been finished. We have developed and implemented an online application for mentors and mentees. We have a replicable model for mentor skillbuilding and training. The ongoing cost of incentives is small, especially considering the benefit of increasing quality across the state."

By pursuing both federal and state funding opportunities, Todd expects to expand the mentoring program to help even more providers throughout the state, well before the 2020 deadline arrives.

If the phrase *child care resource and referral agency* seems familiar, it's because our very own Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) now serves as the child care resource and referral agency for this region, which includes Stark, Summit, Medina, Portage, Trumbull, and Mahoning counties.

ECRC Executive Director Scott Hasselman sits on OCCRRA's board, as do the heads of the other resource and referral agencies from across the state.

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