



Hope

Hope Endures

Connecting Stark County to Vital Support

In any community, seeking help can feel overwhelming with countless calls, bus rides, and online searches often leaving people feeling hopeless. **But hope endures.**

Recognizing this struggle, the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton partnered with community leaders and service providers under the direction of Dr. Anju Mader, Chief Health Integration Officer for Stark Mental Health and Addiction Recovery (StarkMHAR), to create ConnectWell CIE of East Central Ohio, a community information exchange network.

According to Dr. Mader, “ConnectWell CIE of East Central Ohio provides the essential infrastructure for our care coordination network to shift from reactive, siloed support services to a proactive, holistic, and person-centered care system. Individuals will experience reduced burden from self-navigating for resources, less trauma from repeating their story and history to different providers, improved access to and coordination of services, better health outcomes and quality of life, and a more equitable distribution of resources.”

This new resource links individuals to essential services such as housing, food, healthcare, transportation, legal aid, and more, through a secure, closed-loop referral system powered by the national technology platform, Unite Us. Individuals can “enter” the system at many different access points, including doctors’ offices, hospitals, social service agencies, and more.

Launched in 2025, with collaboration from local foundations, health systems, government agencies, and nonprofits, ConnectWell CIE is building a healthier, more connected region. And the impact is already clear: a projected \$19.3 million in healthcare savings within the first year. Nonprofit organizations participate at no cost, ensuring that help remains within reach for those who need it most.

In Stark County, hope isn’t just a word; it’s a network, and it endures. ✨

LEARN MORE ABOUT *ConnectWell CIE of East Central Ohio* ONLINE AT GOODWILLGOODSKILLS.ORG/CONNECTWELL



Early Childhood Resource Center

Sparking Hope

FOR 25 YEARS



Nothing sparks hope quite like children. Children have a remarkable ability to find joy, whether it's in everyday things or something new and exciting. It's that curiosity and joy that helps us, as adults, find hope in the future.

Twenty-five years ago, the Foundation took that spark of hope and applied it to a community problem: a lack of accessible, high-quality, trustworthy child care in Stark County. This discovery, a result of a community needs assessment, launched the creation of the Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC) in 2000. With funding from the Foundation, ECRC was created to increase the amount of high-quality early childhood education and care options. Initially, the ECRC's primary offerings focused on professional development courses, child care accreditation courses, and technical assistance and mentoring to child care providers and early childhood professionals. It wasn't until 11 years later that the ECRC began directly serving families with young children when it moved to its current headquarters (PICTURED ABOVE) in Canton. At that time, new parent engagement, education, and support services, including parenting courses and

mentoring, were added to program offerings. Not long after, ECRC took over the Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK) kindergarten readiness program, which had been operating under the direction of the Foundation. This unique, in-home program created a new spark of hope for Stark County's youngest learners and their families.

Before long, the State of Ohio recognized the great work of ECRC and designated it as the Child Care Resource and Referral agency serving Mahoning, Medina, Portage, Stark, Summit, and Trumbull counties in 2017. The organization continues to shine hope for a positive future, adding even more impactful services and resources to its offerings, such as child care referrals, parent education, fatherhood programming, support for kinship, adoption, and foster families, and so much more.

The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Canton could not be prouder of the growth and accomplishments of the ECRC, where the child is the center of everything they do. That guiding light and focus is an inspiration, and the number of children, families, and early childhood professionals served over the last 25 years is nothing short of spectacular.

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EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCE CENTER *2025 By the Numbers*



451
PARENT CLASSES
OFFERED & 450+
DADS ENGAGED

Strengthening Families:

Every class, conversation, and connection builds stronger families and safer, healthier futures for children.



3,137
CHILDREN VISITED
THE CENTER WITH
THEIR FAMILIES

Serving as a Community Hub:

From play to parent support, the ECRC is a welcoming space for learning, connection, and growth.



5,696
COACHING SESSIONS
& 631 PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
CLASSES OFFERED

Supporting Child Care Providers:

Trained more than 8,600 early educators across six counties.



326
FAMILIES REFERRED
TO HIGH-QUALITY
CHILD CARE
PROGRAMS

Helping Families Find Care:

When families need safe, reliable child care, the ECRC is here to help them find the right fit.



577
STARK CHILDREN
SERVED THROUGH
SPARK & 4,655 FREE
BOOKS DISTRIBUTED

SPARKing Kindergarten Readiness:

Across the state, ECRC has overseen replication sites that serve more than 2,000 children each year.

Spark Hope through a Stronger Workforce



In 2025, the Foundation was proud to partner with the ECRC on an initiative designed to support child care professionals, improving the quality of and access to care for families with young children.

With funds from the Foundation, the ECRC is offering two programs: (1) a best practice, business-focused program called All Our Kin for in-home, family child care centers, and (2) the Child Care Administrator Leadership Project focused on improving child care center workplace culture and leadership skills for a small group of center administrators.

Since the pandemic, there has been a growing workforce shortage in the early childhood field. Organizations like the ECRC are hard at work to make sure those who work in the critical area of child care feel supported and challenged, and have the skills to successfully care for children and run an important business. Both of these programs teach leadership skills, communication and conflict resolution tactics, financial management, marketing and recruitment strategies, and provide coaching from an ECRC staff member. By participating in these programs, both the employees and child care centers are strengthened, rejuvenated, and filled with hope. ✨

LEARN MORE ABOUT *Early Childhood Resource Center* ONLINE AT ECRESOURCECENTER.ORG

Hope Endures for the Homeless

When the chill of winter sets in and shelter is nowhere to be found, hope can feel distant. Yet each fall, the Foundation renews its commitment to partnering with providers and others in the community to ensure that no one faces the cold alone. More than just logistics, these conversations are also about preserving dignity and restoring hope.

In 2025, the Point-in-Time Count revealed a sobering reality: 101 individuals were living without shelter. This was a 55 percent increase from the previous year. This alarming rise sparked urgent action. During a monthly roundtable discussion with provider organizations, the mayor of Canton called upon Refuge of Hope to lead the overnight overflow shelter at St. Paul AME Church, later transitioning to the former Dueber Elementary due to increased space needs. With support from the City of Canton and the Sisters of Charity Foundation, and coordination through the Stark Housing Network, the shelter opened its doors every night from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., December through February, offering warmth, safety, and a reminder that people care.

Truly living up to its name, Refuge of Hope didn't stop there. Its main facility became a daytime warming center where clients could escape the biting cold with a hot meal and connections to services.

But hope had to reach further. Families with children were increasingly affected, and from August 2024 to August 2025, numbers of families experiencing unsheltered homelessness rose from seven to 32. In response, Alliance for Children and Families stepped in with dedicated outreach and stabilization efforts. Funded by the Sisters of Charity Foundation, its work ensured that families were seen, supported, and uplifted.

In helping people to survive the past winter, the Foundation's collaborative partners honored their dignity and helped to restore their health and hope. This winter's urgent demands reaffirmed the Foundation's commitment to our long-term mission to address the root causes of homelessness. ✧

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

— MATTHEW 25:40

LEARN MORE ABOUT *Refuge of Hope Ministries* ONLINE AT REFUGEOFHOPE.ORG