

Charities put spotlight on giving little ones a jump on learning

By Hart Caparulo, Will Ginsberg
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AS New Haven area children 5 and over begin returning to classes, our region's philanthropy is focused as never before on children too young for school.

Working hand-in-hand, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven and United Way of Greater New Haven are marshaling donors and volunteers for their early childhood initiatives FirstYearsFirst and Success By 6. The NewAlliance Foundation, the philanthropic arm of NewAlliance Bank, is supporting their efforts. Why the increased emphasis on early childhood development?

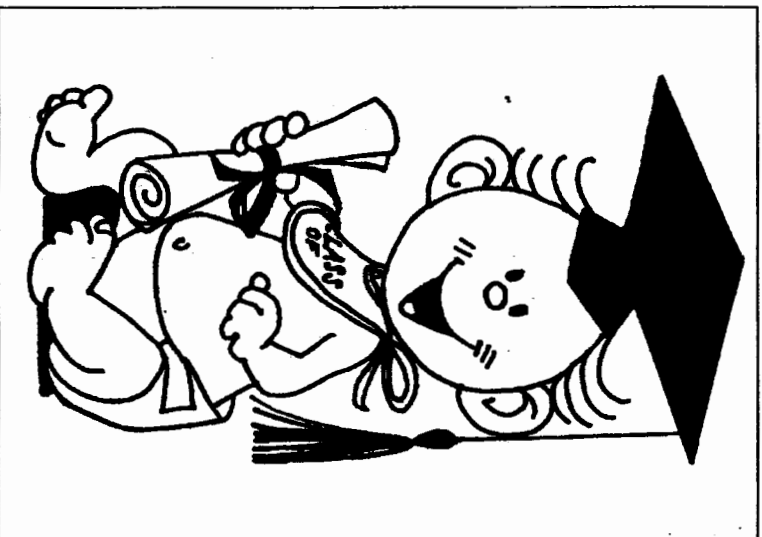
■ Early education matters. Learning starts early. Research indicates that some 85 percent of the core brain structure is formed by 3. Yet early years receive the least public attention and support.

■ There is an economic payoff. Giving young children a fair chance at school success increases the likelihood they will become contributing members of society while reducing the costs of crime, welfare, and remedial education. One study indicates each dollar invested in early childhood development yields \$8 in future benefits.

■ It is important to our community. Through a broad-based effort to seek community input, the community foundation and United Way have verified that early childhood education and development is regarded as a priority in the New Haven region.

Through their FirstYearsFirst initiative, the community foundation supports an expanding roster of community-based programs aimed at children from birth to 5: quality care (defining and promoting standards for high quality early care); medical care (creating model pediatric care in underserved communities); family learning (strengthening the parental role of teacher); family wealth (fostering financial literacy); public policy (advocacy for early childhood issues).

Over \$6 million has been invested in these programs since 2002, including foundation grants and federal funding via New Haven



Healthy Start, the region's maternal and child health program administered by the foundation. The foundation seeks to raise significantly more for FirstYearsFirst.

The foundation is co-sponsoring local implementation of Ready, Set, Grow — Cf Kids, a grass-roots campaign aimed at policy-makers. It seeks to enroll one adult for every state child under 5, about 220,000 people, and mobilize them in support of getting all children to the kindergarten door healthy and ready for school success.

The foundation will be launching a comprehensive study to track progress toward school readiness of selected city babies born in 2004.

A national program undertaken by more than 350 United Ways, Success By 6 has invested tens of millions of dollars. United Way of Greater New Haven is implementing the program local-

ly. In the first year, grants of over \$230,000 have been approved, focusing on two priorities: supporting and educating primary care givers about the important milestones their children must reach in order to begin school success-ready, and improving the quality of early care and education for all children in the region.

United Way is also supporting implementation of Born Learning, a partnership of United Way of America and the Ad Council, which provides care givers "doable" action steps to turn everyday moments into learning opportunities for children.

Philanthropic institutions have an obligation not only to solicit and disburse funds for existing programs, but also to identify where long-term value can be added and to work for change in those areas. Accordingly, the NewAlliance Foundation has been a leading investor in the Motherread/Fatherread initiative here and has pledged up to \$300,000 over three years for the local Success By 6 program.

Having identified early childhood as a critical priority for Greater New Haven, the community foundation, United Way, and The NewAlliance Foundation are working together to educate the public, to build networks of donors, volunteers, leaders, organizations and academic experts in the area, and to measure the outcomes of the projects funded.

In short, early childhood programs are being given a high priority in the New Haven area. They are not just for families with young children. As an investment in human capital, they promise long-term benefits for the entire region.

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