



United Way of Chester County Education Initiative Update March 2015

Studies show that when children receive quality early learning experiences, they enter school more prepared, with a direct correlation between reading proficiency and school success. Children's success in school, of course, predicts their success in life. Those who don't complete high school are more likely to be unemployed and burden welfare, health care and judiciary systems. A vibrant economy depends on engaged citizens with marketable skills. The United Way of Chester County recognizes that ensuring a good start in school for all children is an important investment in the future of the community.

United Way of Chester County (UWCC) launched an *Early Education Initiative* to promote full and equitable access to quality early learning, which low-income families in Chester County may not be able to afford for their preschoolers. UWCC strategies are to

1. enhance the capacity of parents and other caregivers to capably and confidently meet their children's early literacy development needs
2. convene stakeholders across all sectors-child care providers, nonprofits, corporate, civic and faith-based groups, schools, government agencies and elected officials-to improve access to quality early learning for those in need
3. mobilize volunteers to create structured learning opportunities, as reading buddies, book suppliers, mentors and parenting educators
4. develop broad public awareness of the value of quality early learning
5. advocate for systems that support equitable access to quality early learning

UWCC realized that local communities with pockets of low-income households could benefit from public Born Learning Trails, offered through United Way and a national Born Learning® campaign to provide parents and other caregivers with learning activities for young children. The trails are a series of metal signs and stenciled prompts that can help adults develop preschoolers' language skills and foster an eagerness to learn. UWCC envisioned county-wide, strategically placed Born Learning Trails to touch many lives and promote early childhood learning throughout Chester County. Volunteers in UWCC's Days of Caring since 2009 have installed 9 trails throughout Chester County, funded by private, civic and corporate sponsors and grants from 1675 Foundation, CCRES and the UWCC Financial Stability Partnership.

Born Learning Trails offer long-term value to the community beyond the learning activity they provide to children and the quality time for families. UWCC awareness events as the trails are installed serve to educate community leaders, elected officials, corporate and civic volunteers about the importance of early education. When youth are engaged in trail installation, the experience helps them recognize the importance of early learning for the next generation.

Now, thanks to another CCRES grant, 8 of the Born Learning Trails UWCC initiated throughout Chester County will have Little Free Libraries added at their sites. These Libraries are designed to promote reading with a "take one, leave one" approach at the outdoor activity locations. Siemens volunteers built the first 3 Little Free Libraries to add to Born Learning Trail sites in West Chester, East Goshen and Phoenixville in March 2015. Local resident volunteers will maintain the Little Free Libraries at these sites. Soon the James A. Umble Memorial Park in Honey Brook Township will have a Little Free



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Library built by SABIC-IP volunteers added to the Born Learning Trail they installed in the fall.

Public introductions of the Little Free Libraries are planned for spring, the first at the annual Easter Egg Hunt at East Goshen Park just outside West Chester April 4, 2015.

Trail Location	Volunteers	Sponsors	Other Partners
Chester County Technical College High School-Pickering (Phoenixville)	Communications Test Design, Inc. (CTDI) Parsons Family & Friends CCTCHS Students	CTDI Kevin & Lisa Parsons	CCIU Child Care/Head Start Program Early Childhood Coalition
Charles A. Melton Arts & Education Center, West Chester	Comcast employees and families	Comcast	
Chester County Technical College High School, West Grove	CTDI	CTDI CCRES UWCC Financial Stability Partnership	
Ash Park, Coatesville	Siemens Healthcare Coatesville Youth Initiative	CCRES	CCIU Head Start CCIU Alternative Education students City of Coatesville
(Confidential) for Domestic Violence Center of Chester County	Westtown-Goshen Rotary Club	Westtown-Goshen Rotary Club	
Johnsontown Community Park, Downingtown	Downingtown Area School District Administrators Johnsontown Community Group	CCRES UWCC Financial Stability Partnership Home Depot	Borough of Downingtown
East Goshen Park, West Chester	CTDI	Friends of East Goshen Park CTDI	East Goshen Township
The Point, Parkesburg	Word of Life Church The Point's youth	1675 Foundation	
James A. Umble Memorial Park, Honey Brook	SABIC-IP	1675 Foundation SABIC-IP	Honey Brook Township Honey Brook Lions