



2020 Year in Review

*Celebrating 50 Years of Creating
Opportunities through Education*

Persevering During a Pandemic





Since 1970, The Community Group (TCG) has been guided by its mission to create, manage, and nurture high-quality programs focused on education and related services that support Lawrence children, families, and educators. Established in 1970 as a preschool center to serve the child care needs of working families, TCG has steadily expanded its programs in response to the education, child care, training, and enrichment needs of children and families.

Today, TCG is a multifaceted nonprofit organization that provides a wide range of educational programs reaching thousands of children annually from infants through 8th grade - we strive to offer support to our local community and stay dedicated to our individual missions.



The mission of The Community Group is to create, manage, and nurture high quality programs focused on education and related services that support families.



The mission of Community Day Public Charter Schools (CDCPS) is to provide a kindergarten through grade eight school that will draw upon our considerable experience in working together as a community to develop and implement a curriculum that discovers and supports the special characteristics and unique learning styles of each student.



The mission of Child Care Circuit is to provide families with stabilization by connecting them to resources and acting as a first point of family engagement to ensure that children access safe, healthy, and affordable child care.



The mission of Community Day Learning Programs (our early childhood and school-age care and enrichment programs) is to provide the highest quality of education and care for children. Throughout our history, we have supported children and their families within a larger circle that includes their neighborhoods, schools, cultural groups, and employers.

LETTER FROM THE CEO



It is hard to believe that it was just over a year ago when I began my tenure as the new CEO of The Community Group.

I began working for TCG in 1994, and since then, I have witnessed the organization grow, expand, and serve the community with dedication and unwavering commitment. TCG has weathered many challenges through the years, but nothing compares to what we all have experienced this past year.

Last spring we were at our most vulnerable dealing with the unknown, but our collective vulnerability paved the way for unwavering resilience. When the pandemic shut our community down, we were among the first to step up and offer emergency child care in the city of Lawrence. Community Day Charter Public Schools teachers learned new ways to teach remotely. Business office staff set up offices in our living rooms. We have ALL been a part of more Zoom meetings than ever imaginable.

We analyzed, adapted, and progressed.

As challenging as 2020 was, it also helped us to refocus on our core purpose and mission. The challenges we have faced have brought us together in ways we could not have predicted, and they have strengthened our priorities and values as an organization.

What lessons did we learn in 2020? We learned that TCG is built to persevere. Our mission is to serve families, and nothing - not even a pandemic - could stop us from doing our job. We learned that our most important asset is our people, and that in times of challenge, the relationships and trust that we have built with one another will carry us through those tough times. We learned that when our old ways don't work any more, we become flexible, adaptable, and innovative. We learned that TCG, like the rest of the country, needs to reckon with the individual and structural racism that impacts our community each day.

I hope that these pages will serve as a testament to the difficulties, triumphs, and accomplishments of 2020. This will be a year that we never forget.

Thank you for making TCG a true community.

Un Abrazo,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Maria Gonzalez Moeller".

Maria Gonzalez Moeller





Persevering During a Pandemic: An inside look at each TCG Program and our Response to the Coronavirus.

In March of 2020, the world changed. Schools, businesses, and programs closed, due to a deadly virus circulating the globe. COVID-19.

Like the rest of the world, TCG programs were forced to close, including our early learning centers, Community Day Charter Public Schools, TCG childcare programs, and our offices. Initially we thought the closure was going to last for a few weeks, but then a global pandemic was officially declared. Now, almost a year later, CDCPS schools and some TCG offices are still closed, employees are working from home, and our early education programs are operating, but with drastic changes.

The services TCG provides fill a need within the local community. We could not stay closed and ignore the children and families who have depended on us for the past 50 years. We needed to find ways to operate in safe and unique ways, while still continuing to provide the quality of child care and education expected of us. A mere three weeks after the global shutdown, we opened one of the first emergency child care facilities in Lawrence. All of our facilities enforced new health and safety guidelines and implemented multiple layers of protection for our families and staff, including mask wearing, social distancing, and extra cleaning. Each program had its own individual challenges to overcome, and each found unique and effective ways to persevere.

Child Care Circuit

During the pandemic, Child Care Circuit and its peer agencies have once again proven the importance of Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) agencies to the field of early education and care. Child Care Circuit is one of seven CCRR agencies in Massachusetts.

The CCRRs manage child care vouchers for the Department of Early Education and Care, and serve as trusted stewards of these public funds. CCRRs ensure that families can access child care and that providers are paid in an efficient manner.

Maida Collins is the Senior Customer Service Coordinator at Circuit. Maida has been with Circuit for more than twelve years, and she is deeply committed to helping families in need access child care. When the pandemic hit, Maida and her teammates at Child Care Circuit immediately pivoted to serving families remotely, but this has not been without its challenges. As Maida points out, it has been a challenge “assuring our parent clients that we are still there to support them, even when things take longer, like providing vouchers for childcare...it’s harder to show our clients that we care and we continue to give 100%.”

Although much of it happens behind the scenes now, Maida and her colleagues have given more than 100%. Not only have they served families remotely, Circuit also became a critical element of the public infrastructure to distribute pandemic relief to providers. Local officials, state officials, and private foundations have all turned to Circuit to distribute relief funds to the field during COVID-19. Circuit has ensured that relief funds make their



TCG CEO, Maria Gonzalez Moeller with Mayor Daniel Rivera and Director of Human Services, Martha Velez

seeing my bright and motivated (and funny) coworkers used to be a highlight of my day.” But Circuit staff have been there for each other: “With employees out sick and everchanging schedules with working from home, we have covered for and supported each other both personally and professionally.”

Although we are in the midst of one of the most challenging times in Circuit history, we stay committed to families, our mission, each other, and the community.

way into the hands of providers and educators, even if that means individually calling them to walk them through the process of applying for or accessing funds.

When Lawrence Mayor Dan Rivera established the Mayor’s Scholarship Fund to provide more families with licensed child care during the pandemic, Child Care Circuit wrote scholarship vouchers to over 200 families and distributed these funds to providers and educators throughout the city. Dedicated staff members worked late, came in early, and worked weekends to offer in-person support to families.

Child Care Circuit staff have done all of this while operating mostly remotely and supporting each other through this challenging transition. As Maida points out, “I miss not being able to see my coworkers like I used to. Coming into work and

Maida Collins: “I have seen many changes since I started working here, but nothing has forced us to change as drastically as the 2020 pandemic. Perhaps the hardest part is having children out of school or child care, and trying to explain to young children what is going on around them. This is an issue for me not just at work, but also at home with my own grandchildren.”



Training During the Pandemic

Throughout the pandemic, The Community Group has continued to provide training for early childhood and out-of-school-time educators through the Community Training Group and the StrongStart Northeast Professional Development Center. Our training division quickly pivoted to virtual trainings and was able to provide much-needed support to the field throughout 2020. The StrongStart Professional Development Center offered over 90 trainings in 2020, as well as over 100 Professional Learning Communities for thousands of educators and leaders in the field.

In addition, Community Training Group has partnered with Northern Essex Community College, North Shore Community College, and Urban College to offer a number of English and Spanish language college courses to help individuals enter into the field of early education, and advance their careers.

Center Based Child Care



TCG child care centers have continued to provide care and support for children and families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In the very earliest weeks of the pandemic, when most of the state was in lockdown, TCG opened an emergency child care center to serve children of essential workers and vulnerable families. Once all child care programs were able to open again, we opened child care programs for children from infancy through age 13 and began operating in-person immediately.



TCG has also partnered closely with Lawrence Public Schools and Community Day Charter Public Schools to provide remote learning support for school age children. Children enrolled in LPS or CDCPS can attend a TCG remote learning support center where they receive help with remote learning, lunch and snacks, and afternoon enrichment. TCG works with LPS and CDCPS to ensure that children receive the support they need to be successful with remote learning. Currently, TCG is operating four in-person early childhood centers, as well as four remote learning support sites for children from Lawrence Public Schools and Community Day Charter Public Schools.



Christine Gil, director of Community Day Early Learning Center, has been with TCG since 2013 when she began her tenure as a teacher. Christine progressed from teacher, to mentor, to trainer, to the Director of the LEAP program, and she now serves as program Director of our largest early childhood center at 20 Ballard Way. As someone who was integral to our reopening, Christine has seen firsthand what the challenges are of operating during COVID – social distancing in the classroom can be hard for both children and teachers. She misses having families visit the classroom: “I really miss having that connection and nurturing with others.” Nonetheless, she is proud that TCG child care programs have found new and innovative ways to support families, from increasing communication to supplying families in crisis with critical items such as clothing, diapers, food, and even furniture. Her ability to empathize with parents comes from her own experience – Christine’s own son attended a TCG child care program, and is now a Community Day Charter Public School student, so she knows the challenges of parenting during a pandemic as well as anyone!



Christine Gil: “The agency has given a lot of support to the teachers and other staff with great training on how to follow new guidelines...(they) provided me with the necessary support to cope with daily situations directors face.”



Family Child Care

TCG Family Child Care (FCC) educators are entrepreneurial educators who run their own home-based businesses with support from TCG. The COVID-19 shutdowns in March were especially painful for FCC educators, who form close bonds with the children and families in their programs. During the statewide child care closure, several TCG educators – Carolina Hidalgo, Marlene Castillo, and Santa Acosta - even opened the doors of their homes to provide emergency child care to essential workers and vulnerable families. Santa, who has been with TCG since 2016, is an example of the dedication of FCC educators. Santa says that “it has been my life’s passion to be able to educate, and to work with the critical development of children within my community.”

Once non-emergency child care programs reopened over the summer, 72 of our 75 FCC educators reopened their programs. FCC educators, just like our center-based child care programs, are working tirelessly to provide safe environments and comply with new health and safety regulations. Many are simultaneously caring for infants and supporting school-aged remote learners. As FCC educators worked to safely reopen their businesses, the TCG administrative staff worked to support them, ensuring that critical information was relayed to educators in a timely manner, providing support with reopening plans, and keeping lines of communication open. In the spring, TCG home visitors even delivered backpacks filled with materials and books for children preparing to enter kindergarten.



Ernestina Luna has been a child care educator for 17 years and still has the same passion and excitement for her profession as when she started. She chose this profession because she has always loved being around children and knew she had the ability to provide them with a loving, friendly, and educational environment. In her program she proudly provides her children with a safe, secure environment where they feel welcomed, loved and are able to play and explore by using their creativity to learn. She happily plays and learns along with each child and loves that every day is a new experience.

Enrichment

TCG's Enrichment programs serve children ages 6 - 13, and typically take place after school, during school vacations, and during the summer. Enrichment programs were closed throughout the spring, but staff spent that time planning an amazing summer enrichment program that included both virtual and in-person programming.

Despite extraordinary circumstances, TCG's summer enrichment programs provided over 300 Lawrence students and families with hands-on experiential learning, nutritious meals, and most importantly, opportunities for safe socialization. The 4-week, half-day virtual summer program featured music, art, and cooking programs and served 100 Lawrence students. Families were able to pick up remote learning supply kits, including percussion instruments, art supplies and ingredients for the virtual baking class, via curbside pick-up. In collaboration with Lawrence Public Schools (LPS), TCG also delivered an in-person enrichment program to 230 students at three local sites. This full-time, in-person program, which began in July and ran until the first day of school in September, met the needs of many families who had no option to work from home. Having access to child care for their children was critical to their continued employment.

In September of 2020, due to the high rates of COVID-19 in the community, schools in Lawrence made the decision to operate in a fully remote model. To meet the needs of families, TCG's Enrichment team worked with LPS and CDCPS administrators to establish full-day remote learning support centers at multiple sites in the city. For parents like Elizabeth Marino, this support was vital. Ms. Marino experienced significant health challenges that required surgery, and she subsequently lost her job in early 2020. The option of full-day, in-person care as she recovered from surgery provided vital support for her and her family. In this time of crisis, she was grateful not only for the support offered through child care, but also for the additional support provided by TCG, such as a holiday food basket and coats donated through TCG's annual coat drive.

Each day at the program, staff helped ensure students were successful in online class sessions with teachers, and also that they completed assigned work during independent work blocks. Following the school day, students participated in activities that aimed to give children a break from screens, rejuvenate their bodies and minds, and provide in-person time with peers. Outdoor time, arts and crafts, drumming classes, dance classes, creative projects, and hands-on STEM experiences were all part of afternoon enrichment. After he began attending a TCG remote learning support center, Ms. Marino noted a shift in her son's attitude towards schoolwork and an increased sense of confidence in his ability to learn. She attributed this to the consistent care and encouragement of the TCG Enrichment staff, 'they have been so helpful and I am grateful for all they have done for my family.'





Elizabeth Marino,
with her children



Community Day Charter Public Schools

2020 was a year of challenge and resilience for the Community Day Charter Public Schools (CDCPS), our network of three K1 – Grade 8 schools serving a total of 1,200 Lawrence students. At the pandemic's start, all schools immediately pivoted to remote instruction, with teachers and students quickly adapting to Zoom-based class meetings and assignments turned in through Google Classroom. Teachers also supported students' social emotional needs and skills through daily group check-ins, encouraging students to share frustrations and challenges.

In order to help make up for any lost learning time from the spring, in July 2020 40 CDCPS teachers and school leaders led a 4-week Summer Academy Program, providing 60 hours of additional instructional time and individualized academic support. Open to CDCPS students at no cost to families, Summer Academy enrolled 400 CDCPS students in the fully remote program designed to support core academic skills and content. All students learned in small groups with familiar CDCPS teachers who led academic support and instruction as well as enriching activities such as yoga, dance, and mask making.

CDCPS leaders spent much of the summer planning for the unknown. They designed three different possible models of instruction-- fully remote, hybrid, and fully in-person instruction -- with the intention of adopting a hybrid model for school year 2020-21. However, by late summer, it was clear that the high COVID-19 rates in Lawrence meant that CDCPS schools would have to adopt the fully remote learning model recommended by DESE for schools in "red" communities. Before the start of school, CDCPS supported teachers with robust professional development and curriculum planning so that all were prepared to instruct, support, and attend to students' needs remotely. Throughout the fall, teachers received on-going virtual coaching to help better engage students, with the goal of "dissolving the screen" between students and teachers.

Despite the immense challenges of remote learning for students, families, teachers, and leaders alike, CDCPS



"I have always said that, as Operations Manager at CDCPS-Prospect, it is my responsibility to help and give the best to our students and families. Every time I can help a family or a student I feel like a winner! From day one that we started remote learning, my house became a school, literally. For my students and families, my support was doubled, constantly on the phone with them answering every question they had. Any questions, concerns, or input needed on how to do things, the doors were always open.

As a parent with students at CDCPS-Webster, the support received from the Head of School, the Operations Manager and the teachers has been outstanding. They have been available anytime of the day, by phone or email. I am more than proud to not only see everything from a work standpoint but also as a parent. Both sides show me the commitment and effort that is put forth every day to support and encourage employees and parents."

Ingrid Portorreal, Operations Manager CDCPS-Prospect for 6 years and parent of CDCPS-Gateway students.

schools have consistently risen to the occasion and ensured that the technological, instructional, and emotional support resources are in place to maintain high quality learning and strong student outcomes. Two-way communication through virtual Curriculum Nights, Coffee Hours, Office Hours, and Parent Surveys have been instrumental in this new reality. At the start of the school year and with each new unit of study, families receive training and orientation on the content and skills their child will be learning, the technology and resources needed, and suggestions for ways to support their child's learning. CDCPS also distributes Curriculum Kits with all needed supplies and manipulatives. Families with significant needs receive intensive support from TCG's new Director of Family Engagement and Support, who helps link to families to needed resources.

CDCPS Program Highlights

97%

Daily remote attendance
across all 3 CDCPS schools

960

Chromebooks were distributed
to CDCPS students

100%

CDCPS parents participated in
Parent-Teacher conferences

350

iPads were distributed to
CDCPS Students

400

Students participated in July
Summer Academy four-week
Academic Support Program

91%

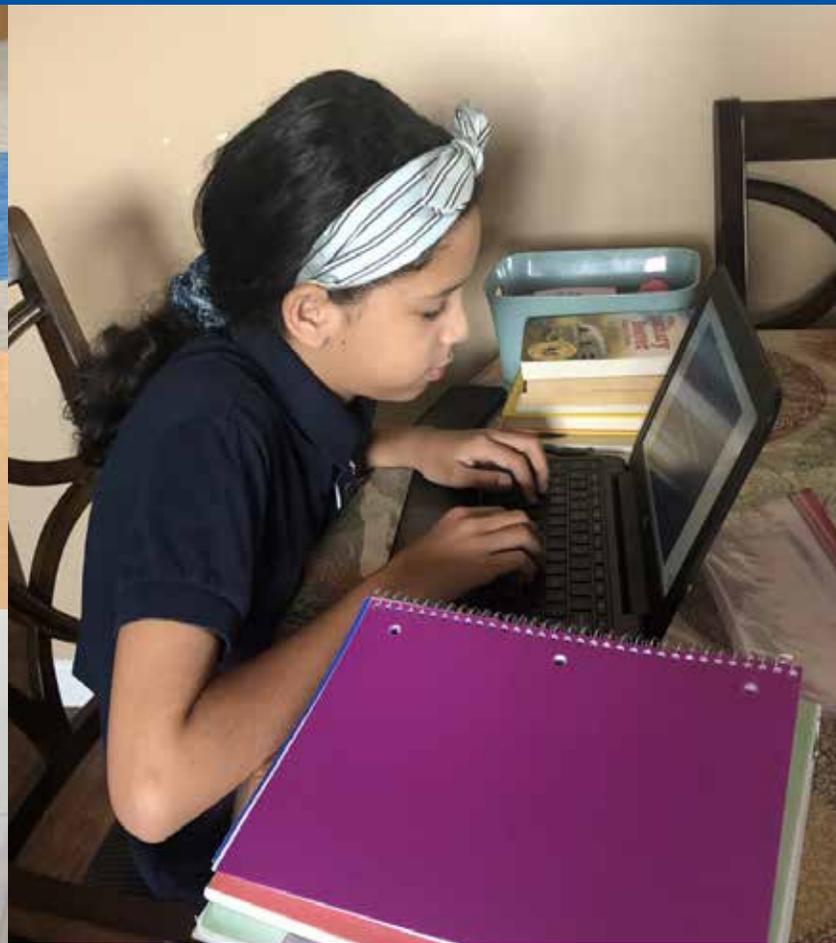
CDCPS Parents felt
supported / very
supported

94.5%

CDCPS Parents felt
their child is getting
appropriate
support

Program Highlights 2020





Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

2020 saw a nationwide movement to address longstanding systemic racism, focused on police brutality but spanning all sectors of our society. The Black Lives Matter movement and widespread calls to address systemic racism spurred a commitment to examine inequities within our own organization here at TCG. We are committed to taking meaningful action to pursue racial and social justice in our agency. Beginning in the summer of 2020, TCG formed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion workgroup to advance our goal of becoming a more equitable and inclusive organization. Simultaneously, the Boards of Directors of The Community Group and Community Day Charter Public Schools formed a joint Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee. TCG has formed a long-term partnership with a highly respected professional development and strategy organization to help us live up to our ideals of becoming more inclusive and just. We know that the work of equity is long-term and complex, and we are committed to engaging in this work thoughtfully, intentionally, and deeply.

PARTNERS AND FUNDERS

TCG is grateful to our funders and partners who make it possible to achieve great outcomes for Lawrence children and families.

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Lawrence Cultural Council
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Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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TCG 2ND ANNUAL COAT DRIVE

140 coats were donated by staff and friends in support of our Second Annual TCG Coat Drive. Thank you all for your support and generosity.

THANK YOU NELLIE



Thank you Nellie Havemeyer for choosing TCG as your Bat Mitzvah project. Donating backpacks to our early education programs and helping generate awareness and donations for our programs.



TCG \$50 for 50 Fifty Years of Success

This fall we instituted the \$50 for 50 Fund to help raise critically needed resources to support our TCG programs and families during this time. Since March, our staff has worked tirelessly to help meet the needs of our children and families, and our goal is to ensure that we can continue to respond to the needs of the community quickly and effectively.

We are asking for your support to ensure that we have the resources we need to do this. We are asking our TCG supporters to donate \$50 in honor of our 50th Anniversary, or whatever amount supporters are able to give, to aid in our efforts. Additionally, please think about who in your life may be willing to support TCG and share this opportunity with them! Together we can make a difference and show our support for our community and families.

Visit the our website to donate: www.thecommunitygroupinc.org/50for50



Community Day Learning | Child Care Circuit
Community Day Charter Public Schools

190 Hampshire Street
Lawrence, MA 01840
www.thecommunitygroupinc.org

