

PRESS RELEASE

Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center
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Collaborating Beyond Our Walls

Collaboration is key and is a characteristic that Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center (HWCEC) and the Early Childhood Initiatives Center (ECIC) embody in everything that they do. "By collaborating with community leaders, educational institutions, corporations, foundations, and early childhood centers, we have a far greater impact together than any of us could have individually," said Michelle Barnes, Executive Director of HWCEC and ECIC.

Community leaders from across the region have stepped up and volunteered to lead change to ensure every child in NWA has access to high quality early childhood education. They are parents, future parents and business leaders from all walks of life who are concerned about the state of early childhood in our region. Development Coalition members include:

Gina Allgaier, Vice President of Marketing,
Bentonville Film Festival

Jennifer Bedwell, Director of Sales, Walmart
Gatorade, PepsiCo

Marcy Camacho, Retail Development Manager,
Nickelodeon

Whitney Cook, VP, Client Service, Acorn

Chris Horton, President & COO, Harrison French &
Associates

Christina Lusk, Chief Development Officer, East-
Harding Construction

Stephanie McCratic, Founder & CEO, Acorn

Angie Muldoon, Associate General Counsel, Sam's Club

Tina Odom, Shopper Marketing Team Lead, Unilever

Becky Schoewe, Fresh Business Analyst, Sam's Club



Development Coalition members Andrea Wilson, Marcy Camacho, Stephanie McCratic and Whitney Cook gather after a meeting (listed from left to right)

Tara Gartman Shaw, Sr. Director, Retail Development, Nickelodeon

Shannon Shoptaw, VP, Group Account Director, IN Marketing

Angie Smith, VP Marketing, A.W. Bravis

Andrea Wilson, Senior Consultant, Beautycounter

Tina Winham, Walmart Team Leader, NUK-USA

“Having quality early childhood education options is critical in securing young business professionals in the area. As a parent of a young child, I have struggled in finding a high-quality program that doesn’t have an extensive waitlist,” said Stephanie McCratic, Development Coalition member and Founder & CEO, Acorn. “Northwest Arkansas relies on these soft infrastructure needs to support today’s workforce. All families should have access to a high quality early education, regardless of income level.”

Many of the coalition members have given personally and challenge corporations to do the same. Workforce readiness and competitiveness is a nonpartisan issue and having quality services available to the region’s workforce begins with early care. There are 32,000 young children in Northwest Arkansas attending early childhood programs and the cost for those families often surpasses rent or a mortgage. Today, families are choosing to keep one parent at home instead of remaining in the workforce, or worse, being forced to find care out of necessity instead of being able to provide a high quality early learning experience.

“I can recall my first experience with “daycare” here in NWA like it was yesterday.” shared Gina Allgaier, Vice President of Marketing for the Bentonville Film Festival. “As a young mother, the demands of an early professional life along with a new infant were overwhelming. I remember walking into a center to pick my baby up, and I just knelt down beside him and cried. I didn’t feel like he was in a good program, or was being well taken care of. No mother or parent should feel that helpless just to go to work. Early childhood professionals are partners with us in raising our children. All parents deserve to feel great about making that choice so they can remain in the workforce.”

Today the average age for Benton County is 32 years old. The programs and services in our community need to evolve to attract and keep younger talent in the area. Marcy Camacho, Retail Development Manager with Nickelodeon adds, “as future parents, my husband and I are looking at Northwest Arkansas as a place to raise our family. Today, it is important to align myself with organizations that can create just that...a future home for our family. The Early Childhood Initiatives Center improves early education throughout the region, and these are the types of services that families of young children rely upon when deciding where to establish roots.”

The Early Childhood Initiatives Center pledges to be an anchor of support to provide resources, training, mentorship and technical assistance for all early learning programs throughout Northwest Arkansas. To invest today, or inquire about the Development Coalition please contact Kristen Herbert kherbert@hwccenter.com or Sunny Lane slane@hwccenter.com, 479-273-3552, www.ecicnwa.org.

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About Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center

Children are our first priority at the Helen R. Walton Children’s Enrichment Center; our doors opened in 1982. We are a trusted name in both the community and the early childhood industry. Our commitment is to provide families access to the highest quality early childhood education and care. The Center reaches beyond our families served and collaborates with early childhood programs throughout Northwest Arkansas. Visit www.hwcec.org to learn more.

About the Early Childhood Initiatives Center

The ECIC collaborates with the nearly 500 early childhood programs in Northwest Arkansas, to ensure that every child, infant through pre-k, has access to the highest quality of early childhood education and care. High-quality early childhood education benefits the child, workforce and society through increased graduation rates, parental earnings and employee retention, and ensures a talent rich pipeline, leading to a \$9.21 return on investment for every dollar spent in early education. We rely on the generosity of volunteers, advocates and donors in our community. Visit ecicnwa.org to learn more.