

## PRESS RELEASE

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### United Way of Northwest Arkansas Awards Grants to Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center

*\$296,000 in Funding to Benefit Children Living in Poverty Through Early Childhood Education*

For Immediate Release  
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Bentonville, ARK. – This week, United Way of Northwest Arkansas awarded \$296,000 in funding to support the high quality early childhood education initiatives at the forefront of the mission of the Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center. Funding will support four programs, two of which will be administered through the Early Childhood Initiatives Center, their training and program development center.



When a young child living in poverty enters Kindergarten, they are already 12-14 months behind. Research shows that when a child receives just one year of high quality early childhood education, they are less likely to require remediation in school, 3 times more likely to graduate high school, and more likely to pursue post-secondary education as well as become higher income earners as adults.

“United Way of Northwest Arkansas has partnered with us to provide professional development for the early childhood center director and teacher, resources for the family, and high quality early education for the child,” said Michelle Barnes, Executive Director of the Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center and Early Childhood Initiatives Center. “This comprehensive approach lays a solid foundation that empowers a child to permanently move out of the crisis of poverty.”

The grant will support the following programs:

#### **Early Childhood Initiatives Center, Early Childhood Education Training Program**

Birth through age 5 is a crucial stage of development when adult-child relationships can have a significant impact on emerging social, behavioral, and readiness skills. Early childhood trainings focus on language, brain development, behavior guidance and parent communication, to give children in poverty a strong start. To provide high-quality early childhood education, early childhood professionals need ongoing professional development to increase their knowledge and incorporate the latest research-based practices into their classrooms.

### **Early Childhood Initiatives Center, Business and Leadership Training Program**

The Business and Leadership programming is a vital component to building a pathway for children living in poverty. We prepare the early childhood center director and administrator to adopt well-designed, well-implemented policies and programs through industry-specific trainings. A director's ability to attract and retain effective teachers leads to stronger relationships between the teacher and child, which is crucial for children living in poverty. As research shows, high quality early experiences can break the cycle of poverty by ensuring a child is kindergarten ready and increasing high school graduation rates.

### **Early Childhood Education for Children Living in Poverty**

The Early Childhood Education for Children Living in Poverty program will remove barriers to ensure 6 children, birth to 5, living in situational poverty have access to free high quality early childhood education. Research shows that if a child receives high quality early education, they are more likely to enter kindergarten ready, require less school remediation and graduate from high school – breaking the cycle of poverty. Community partners will ensure access to therapy, case management, support services while mobilizing parents with ongoing communication and resources to support learning at home and move the family out of poverty.

### **Dolly Parton Imagination Library**

Under the new administration of the Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center, the Dolly Parton Imagination Library will continue to provide preschoolers with a library of books to encourage a love of reading and learning. From birth through age 5, young children receive a carefully selected book in their mailbox every month. Currently over 13,000 books are mailed to children in Northwest Arkansas every year, supporting early literacy, language acquisition and parent engagement.

"Working with local nonprofit organizations like the Helen R. Walton Children's Enrichment Center and making strategic investments at critical points in a child's life, the United Way expects to propel a child along a path of prosperity that ultimately lifts a child permanently out of poverty," said Kim A. Aaron, United Way of Northwest Arkansas President.

For more information, contact Sunny Lane or Kristen Herbert at (479) 273-3552 or visit [ecicnwa.org](http://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 [hwcec.org](http://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](http://ecicnwa.org) to learn more.

**About United Way of Northwest Arkansas**

The United Way of Northwest Arkansas mission is to unite our community to empower people and improve the lives through volunteers, advocates and giving. Bold Goal: To Provide Every Child in NWA a Pathway Out of Poverty! For more information, visit [unitedwaynwa.org](http://unitedwaynwa.org).