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Telling the Story of Child Care

Investing in Reporting to Advance the Care
Conversation

Rebecca Gale

Better Life Lab

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About the Author

Rebecca Gale is a Staff Writer with the Better Life Lab at New America. She is an award-winning journalist with years of experience covering the nexus of politics and people in Washington, DC.

About New America

We are dedicated to renewing the promise of America by continuing the quest to realize our nation's highest ideals, honestly confronting the challenges caused by rapid technological and social change, and seizing the opportunities those changes create.

About Better Life Lab

The Better Life Lab works in solidarity with the movement for work-family justice to transform culture so that people across race, class, ethnicity and gender thrive across the arc of their lives.

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Executive Summary

In 2021, as the proposed Build Back Better legislation, which aimed to allocate significant federal dollars to public care infrastructure, faltered and ultimately failed, the Better Life Lab embarked on a year-long exploration of smaller solutions, successes, and innovations. The goal was to capture efforts already underway to address the broken care system to inspire, offer hope, and ultimately contribute to building a scalable universal child care system that is equitable, affordable, and accessible for parents and offers high-quality care for children and living wages, benefits, and good working conditions for care workers.

Using a **solutions journalism lens**, the Lab published the results of this in-depth reporting project in a 2022 report, *Innovations for Universal Child Care*. This included interviews with a diverse set of providers, parents, innovators, and advocates. The report identified five key areas of innovation and noted 25 innovations. The solutions both highlighted the promise of thinkers, creators, and builders already working to make progress toward a more robust child care sector. The report also emphasized the need for even further experimentation, attention, and investment—particularly sustained public investment—to design and build universal child care infrastructure.

Once we published the report, we realized we had only skimmed the surface. The pandemic had sparked a continued burst of action, both small and large, across the country, as communities sought to grapple with the child care crisis.

At the same time, Better Life Lab writers Haley Swenson and Rebecca Gale argued in the *Columbia Journalism Review* that mainstream news organizations have for too long neglected to cover child care in a sustained, robust, and rigorous way. We made the case for news outlets across the country to dedicate resources to forging child care beats in their newsrooms. Yet we also saw that those same newsrooms were struggling to survive in a tightening economy, shedding jobs and dropping coverage areas. Many lacked the bandwidth to add child care coverage to the reporting beat.

We decided to take advantage of both trends: that there was more to report on child care innovations, and that there were now more seasoned reporters with experience covering policy available in need of work. We offered a round of reporting grants, similar to a previous project in which we had offered reporting grants to independent journalists to dig into understanding the impact of **paid family and medical leave** on workers with care responsibilities. We asked independent journalists, writers, and content creators from a variety of backgrounds and regions in the country to turn their reporting eyes on the child care crisis and places where communities were coming together to seek solutions to address it. The grants were also designed to help develop and support a cadre

of talented journalists and content producers to expand the chorus of storytellers who can write with nuance and understanding about care infrastructure.

What followed was a series of 15 multimedia stories: told through audio, video, graphics, and the written word. We relied upon the solutions journalism model to showcase examples of effective child care systems and innovative small-scale solutions, while still recognizing the need for sustained public funding and support to create permanent, equitable, high-quality, comprehensive infrastructure. Through our reporting grants, we showcased that child care problems exist across the country, at every socioeconomic level—though disproportionately affect the most marginalized and least-resourced populations—and the solutions required must be responsive to the very diverse communities, regions, and families in the United States.

Key takeaways from our stories include:

1. **There is no substitute for federal funding for high-quality, universal, equitable child care infrastructure**, but other entities (workplaces, states, and localities) are recognizing the need for stable child care infrastructure and attempting to fill the gap in the meantime, showcasing the growing interest among the public, local policymakers, and community stakeholders to find workable solutions.
2. **Diverse types of child care arrangements—including home-based care and flexible family, friend, and neighbor care—can help meet the demand of child care** and better serve under-resourced and lower-income populations, especially in rural areas or for families of color.
3. **Educators who receive adequate compensation, training, and support for their role as child care providers are able to do a better job**, stay in their positions longer, and experience less burnout and turnover than those operating in the current system where many child care centers pay poverty wages. A stable workforce not stressed about paying bills improves the quality of care.
4. **The many consequences of a broken system for a variety of populations need to be fully understood** to help build public support for child care, including in the way child care is reported on and visualized in our country.

Throughout the reporting grant process, the Better Life Lab team supported grantees in editorial collaboration—providing expertise, resources, and contacts where needed; sharpening reporting questions; and helping to shape pitches. We also brought the cohort of reporting grantees together for quarterly convenings to create peer networks and provide support. By investing in new voices from across

the country, the reporting grants are equipping a new generation of storytellers who understand care issues deeply and will be able to write with nuance and complexity about care and care infrastructure.

Introduction

In early 2022, after the demise of the federal Build Back Better legislation that would have offered significant funding for a universal child care system, the Better Life Lab decided to build on our [extensive research on child care innovations](#). We found that so many interesting things were happening in child care to address the sector's shortcomings, and there were bright spots across the country: from local leaders taking action and prioritizing care, to organizations working to identify creative ways to secure funding and improve compensation, to funds from the American Rescue Plan's child care dollars uplifting the industry in ways that could have a long-term, sustainable impact. Seeking to build on and expand that seminal work, we put out a call to journalists and writers across the country offering reporting grants for pieces that highlight innovations within the child care field. Specifically, we were interested in uncovering examples of ways in which local governments, organizations, movements, and local stakeholders are taking action to improve our broken, patchwork child care system to increase families' access to affordable, quality care and improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for the care workforce. We were interested in exploring lessons that could be learned and potentially scaled—from nontraditional care systems, family, community, and neighborhood efforts, to improvements in day-to-day care activities to local and state governmental changes in funding, subsidies, regulations, and benefit delivery.

In the Better Life Lab's years of research, reporting, and countless interviews surrounding the need for more stability, quality, affordability, and accessibility within the child care industry, we have found that creating a truly equitable, universal child care system will require robust public investment. We argue that it's time to recognize that, like education, the free market alone can't create that system: Child care infrastructure needs to be seen as a public good, worthy of public investment because it will benefit us all.

The goal of highlighting such innovations in child care is threefold. By widening our lens and focusing on solutions, we can do the following:

1. Bring awareness to creative, potential solutions that could scale and apply to a broader population, jurisdiction, or in multiple child care settings.
2. Highlight that some approaches—while helpful—still fall short of the robust federal investment required for a truly equitable, high-quality, universal child care system.
3. Keep the spotlight on the care crisis, but, instead of disempowering readers and leaving them feeling hopeless, showcase what's possible, offer

bright spots, inspire hope, energize readers, and serve as a call to urgent action.

Creating a steady stream of high-quality, solutions-focused journalism and storytelling is key to keeping the care crisis top of mind and in the national conversation while painting a vision of what a universal child care system could look like, what it will take to get there, the far-reaching consequences if we don't, and the enormous benefits to everyone when we do. Narrative change is central to the Better Life Lab's mission; projects like this give readers the chance to see what solutions could look like and keep the pressure on policymakers, business leaders, and others in power to find real and lasting solutions that will benefit everyone.

Our Process

These multimedia stories—shared through print, audio, video, and graphics—explore this central question: What innovations or solutions are underway that could scale or help build an equitable, high-quality, affordable, accessible, and universal child care system in the United States?

We contracted 10 independent writers and visual storytellers for innovation reporting grants, including those who are experienced and well known in this space and some who are brand new entrants and looking to begin. We also relied on our own reporters within the Better Life Lab to tell these stories and identify trends, bright spots, and new ideas permeating the child care space.

The child care reporting the Better Life Lab team and independent journalists describe in these pieces serve as a shocking wake-up call for how our current system fails to support families and children—specifically mothers—and exacerbates racial, income, and gender inequality. But perhaps more importantly, these stories offer hope for a way forward and show the transformative power that communities can play in deciding to make child care a priority and the tremendous gains available when we invest in the people and places that support our families and take care of our youngest generation.

Creating and implementing a series of reporting grants also gave us an insight into the way in which journalism and storytelling can benefit from a collaborative process. It also allowed us to provide editorial support and encouragement for reporters who came with various levels of expertise in policy reporting. The Lab's narrative change strategy calls for creating and maintaining a firehose of information—including rigorous research and data; evidence-based experiments; compelling stories; economic, demographic, political, and historical context; and policy analysis and solutions—to push against status quo thinking and show a vision of a different way of thinking and acting. In offering reporting grants to a cohort of independent journalists and writers and posing the questions for them to dig into, the Lab is able to broaden the spectrum, diversity, and reach of that firehose.

Investing in Care Journalism: Key Takeaways

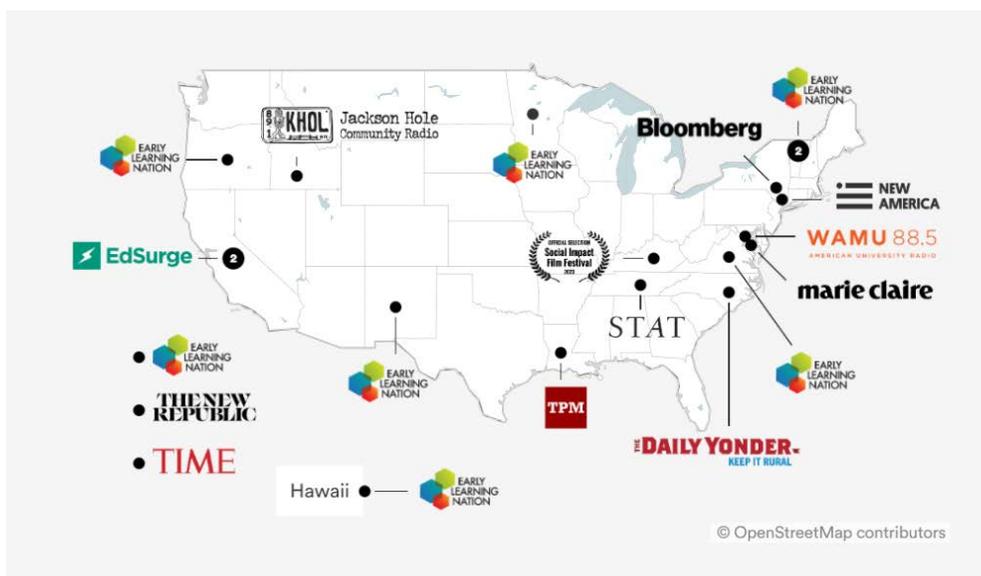
As part of this project, the Better Life Lab offered the solutions journalism framework to our cohort of reporters. Each reporter worked independently (with editorial support available upon request) and used the best of journalism skills to report, interview, search data, and write their own stories.

Here are the key takeaways from our child care innovation reporting grants process:

- Narrative change requires sustained, long-term efforts to highlight the stories of real people and uplift solutions.
- Reporting grants are a useful mechanism for continuing a conversation about policy issues affecting real people, and increasing the diversity of stories.
- By relying on reporting grants as a storytelling mechanism, we are building capacity and growing the chorus of reporters who can write effectively about care and care policy.
- Understanding that policy reporting takes more time and expertise means that more funding and support from media outlets and journalism nonprofits should be provided for the journalists who undertake such endeavors. Support can take various forms, including additional compensation, editorial feedback, and giving solutions-oriented stories priority placement in publication.
- To reach a wide variety of both broad and targeted audiences, varying the mediums in which to tell these stories matters a great deal. Millions of people, parents, kids, providers, and employers rely on our child care systems to make our economy work, and they receive their news in myriad ways. By diversifying our storytelling mechanisms, we are able to reach more people across political, geographic, demographic, and other divides, particularly those that traditional print media sources could miss.

Collection of Stories on Care

Below is a list of 17 stories supported by Better Life Lab's reporting grants. To read the full article, click on the link before each story summary. Stories are listed by date of publication.



Child Care Is in Chaos. Private Equity and For-Profit Chains Are Swooping In

As the industry consolidates, it runs the risk of putting profits ahead of kids—and setting back the movement for universal child care.

By Elliot Haspel, [New Republic](#)

October 28, 2022

Author and former educator Elliot Haspel wrote an article for the *New Republic* about the growing influence of private equity in the child care sector. There had been rumblings about investor-backed chains working against universal child care measures (later confirmed by *New York Times* reporting, which quoted Haspel's work in their story), and Haspel had heard several anecdotes about chains gaining market share as independent programs failed due to challenging economic conditions. Researching this more, it became clear that the chains are operating with little scrutiny—especially compared to those in other countries—and that there were several unexamined ways in which chains work against goals of comprehensive, high-quality, accessible and affordable child care.

How Child Care in Oregon Is Saving the Construction Trade

A statewide apprenticeship program with generous child care subsidies trains and recruits workers.

By Rebecca Gale, [Early Learning Nation](#)

January 30, 2023

The construction boom in Oregon had reached a tipping point—90 percent of construction companies said they didn't have enough qualified workers to meet demand. The state of Oregon wanted to create a pipeline to train more workers and offered child care as one of the benefits for its apprenticeship program. Journalist Rebecca Gale interviewed workers in the program who spoke about what a difference such a benefit makes, particularly in a field like construction that often requires nontraditional hours and can require travel. Having reliable, affordable child care allowed more people to get training and complete their program, which then leads to a stable, quality job and a better outcome for the entire family.

The Power of a Rural Community Collaborative

Idaho's Teton Valley draws a roadmap to address its child care crisis.

By Natalie Schachar, [KHOL Jackson Hole Community Radio](#)

February 6, 2023

In this online story, journalist Natalie Schachar highlights that child care is a critical concern in Teton Valley, Idaho, which has seen the closure of various facilities within the last two years. But amid the crisis, members of the community have come together to form Teton Valley's Collaborative. The group has already gained approval to pursue a lease on a nearly half acre parcel of school district property where a donated house could be moved and turned into a child care facility. They have also helped advocate for an existing child care center, Building Blocks, to keep its current lease and completed an application for a \$1 million dollar grant for early care and education from the Idaho Workforce Development Council. Through their efforts, kids might get care and parents might get some relief. Schachar also reported two additional stories connected to the research of this piece, "[Community Members Seek Use of Teton School District Property for Childcare Facility](#)" in *Teton Valley News* and "[Amid Child](#)," which ran on Jackson Hole Community Radio.

Educator Burnout: Another Child Care Struggle

Facing educator burnout and high rates of depression, educators come up with ways to retain staff and focus on mental well-being.

By Rebecca Gale, [Early Learning Nation](#)

February 28, 2023

Hiring and retaining staff has always been a struggle, but journalist Rebecca Gale spoke to centers who say this is the worst it's ever been—exacerbated by low morale and low wages. Researchers found that depressive symptoms jumped from 19 percent to 32 percent between 2019 and 2022, and teachers were more likely to report every symptom of depression, including restless sleep, poor appetite, or feeling lonely. Many were leaving their positions in child care to work in fast-food or retail to make more money. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, one child care center explained they could hire workers for \$9 or \$10 an hour and expect to have some stability. Now the center offers \$11 to \$13 hourly—straining what the families who use the center can afford to pay—and are still having trouble retaining employees. Gale spoke with child care center directors about what can be done to improve staffing at centers across the country, and why the need for more public funds like those provided through the American Rescue Plan are crucial to giving the hard-working staff a livable wage without burdening the families already paying a significant amount of their take-home pay on child care.

Home-Based Care: Fixing the Child Care Drought in Rural America

Some rural counties are trying an approach to tackle child care shortages: A new program supports home-based child care providers with resources, education, and grants.

By Anne Vilen, [The Daily Yonder](#)

March 7, 2023

Child care advocates in one rural North Carolina county are focusing on home-based child care to address child care shortages. Supported by national, state, and regional funders, the shift to home-based care is designed to bolster a rural economy that runs on seasonal work, small businesses, and low-wage work with nontraditional hours. The initiative also promises to provide quality child care for rural families and get more children ready for kindergarten by age five. Reporter Anne Vilen's interest in small town child care solutions began 25 years ago when her own children attended home-based child care. A generation later, her

conversation with small town movers and shakers, and the women who care for children in rural communities, reveals a visionary infrastructure-building solution that starts with valuing the women who are already taking care of our kids—at home.

DC Is Giving Preschool Teachers a Pay Bump. Here's How It's Making a Difference to Them

The DC Council passed a law in 2022 to [boost pay for the District's early childhood teachers](#) as an annual bonus payment of up to \$14,000 for teachers of children between zero and five years old in preschools and daycares in the District.

By Emily Berman, [WAMU](#)

March 14, 2023

Emily Berman, a seasoned radio reporter, covered how DC child care providers were impacted by the DC Council's plan to boost pay for the city's early care and education teachers. The Pay Equity Fund, which taxed the District's highest earners, sent an annual bonus payment for up to \$14,000 for teachers of children between zero and five years in preschools and child care centers in DC. The goal had been to provide more mechanisms for child care workers to be paid more in line with school teachers. Even though the providers who spoke to Berman echoed how grateful they were to receive the bonus payment, it translated into just \$200 more per week, which is still not enough for many to make a living wage and not have to work a second (or third) job, as many of those interviewed had to do.

The U.S. Finally Started Building a Functional Child Care System during the Pandemic. We're About to Tear It Down.

Pandemic-era funding led to a host of creative local child care solutions. The looming funding cliff puts the country at risk of backsliding on all the progress made over the last three years—progress that has left a deep impact on Americans' lives.

By Bryce Covert, [Talking Points Memo](#)

April 14, 2023

The federal government sent states historic amounts of funding during the pandemic to support the child care sector. Journalist Bryce Covert decided to look at what states actually did with that money. Did they all accept it? What did they use it for? Covert found that across all states, both blue and red, the money

was put to innovative and important uses such as substantially expanding eligibility to child care assistance, making the assistance low-cost or even free for families, and compensating providers in fairer, more robust ways. The pandemic experiment proved that states are not only eager to build a better child care system, but have great ideas about what the system of the future should look like—they just don't have the money. And, unfortunately, as the funding starts to run out we're at risk of losing all of that forward progress.

How to Fix Crumbling Child Care Infrastructure

U.S. cities and states are starting to think about early childhood facilities the same way they plan for schools and public transportation.

By Kendra Hurley, [Bloomberg](#)

April 25, 2023

Kendra Hurley's story explores a topic that is an under-reported yet crucial piece of the child care crisis: facilities. Early education programs rarely generate enough revenue to cover the costs of facility upkeep, expansion, or construction. Steep facility costs drive down worker wages, push up tuition costs, and fuel the child care shortage. They also leave kids in unhealthy environments and parents and their employers stranded when facilities close for emergency repairs. Yet the federal government does not treat child care as an infrastructure problem.

As the country emerged from COVID lockdowns, Hurley noticed a promising trend develop: Several local and state leaders were looking to grow child care programs using classic planning tools. Officials in Honolulu had taken stock of public land and property that might house low- or no-rent early education facilities. Colorado and California revamped land zoning policies to make it easier for family child care to grow. New York City carved out new tax perks for property owners and employers willing to help construct child care. Hurley's story, which ran in *Bloomberg's* CityLab, highlights these and other low-cost examples of cities and states planning for child care as infrastructure.

Why Saving New York City’s Universal Preschool Matters for the Country

The high demand for New York City’s 3K for All universal pre-K program means that not all families who qualify can get a spot.

By Kelly Clancy, New America’s [The Thread](#)

May 25, 2023

Journalist, writer, and political scientist Kelly Clancy reported on the state of 3K and pre-K for all in New York City, and why families who qualify for a spot in the City’s program cannot access one. She interviewed members of city council, union members, parents, former NYC Department of Education members, and researchers to understand the shifts between the de Blasio administration and the Adams administration in terms of the expansion and funding of universal pre-K in the city. The different tactics between the administrations created vastly different outcomes: De Blasio created an aggressive outreach strategy to recruit students into the program, envisioning an eventual process of expanding to universal child care. Adams, however, has invested less in recruiting and has pushed to defund the program—justifying this decision by citing a lack of demand—and moving toward a more traditional “means tested” approach. Clancy found that the political forces that shape the city leadership can affect who gets into a program and which families understand how to apply and when: The result being that fewer families have the opportunity for the 3K and pre-K program, even though the City has demonstrated a willingness and capability to serve more families. Clancy’s reported piece ran in *The Thread*, New America’s digital magazine.

More Hospitals Are Offering Child Care. But They Shouldn’t Have To

On-site child care is a valuable benefit for health care employees, but is depending on a generous employer the best way to fix the child care crisis?

By Rebecca Gale, [Stat News](#)

May 30, 2023

The lack of federal child care infrastructure means that the health care industry is stepping in to create its own child care systems. Journalist Rebecca Gale’s piece for *Stat News* focused on the how and why of hospitals and health care systems taking action to combat a **staff recruitment and retention crisis** that is particularly acute for **nurses**, who are overwhelmingly women and who **resigned** from hospital work in huge numbers during the first two years of the pandemic.

Gale’s piece covered several hospital systems, some of which serve as the largest employer in their region, offering child care options both as a perk to employees and as a way to reduce absenteeism. While this may be a good solution for those families affected, it still indicates a broader need for better public policy solutions, like federal investment in child care. *Stat News* is a publication geared toward people connected to the healthcare industry.

Invisible Care Work of Family, Friends, and Neighbors: A Two-Part Series

The work of family, friends, and neighbors in caring for children is critical, but it often goes unseen in an already overlooked child care workforce. Connections to organizations and resources can make a difference for family, friend, and neighbor child care providers.

By Ashley Álvarez, *EdSurge*

A Job That No One Sees

June 2, 2023

‘The Truth Is, I Love the Work’

June 7, 2023

The two-piece article series shared the experiences of five California-based child care providers often referred to as family, friend, and neighbor providers (FFNs). The first article, “**A Job That No One Sees**,” focused on highlighting the challenges experienced by three of the five providers, including economic precarity and lack of systemic supports. The second article, “**The Truth Is, I Love the Work**,” focused on the resources the outside organization First Five California provided the remaining two interviewees. These supports strengthened their ability to provide the best care to the children of their community, one in Los Angeles and the other in the agricultural city of Salinas. In reading this series, readers will be struck by the commitment and skill of these FFNs in the face of challenging circumstances. The women—all Central American immigrant women from low-income backgrounds—have a commitment to supporting the families they work with despite low wages, minimal institutional support, and a perceived social devaluation of their labor. As advocates and policymakers consider how to move toward a universal, just child care infrastructure, the voices of FFNs are critical to understanding a historically undervalued workforce and the resources needed to support them. The series was written by Ashley Álvarez, a current undergraduate student at Harvard University and an aspiring early childhood and K-12 professional.

When Summer Camp Doesn't Work for Your Kid

The lack of federal infrastructure for child care is particularly challenging for kids who are a poor fit for traditional summer camps and have few other options.

By Rebecca Gale, [TIME](#)

June 3, 2023

Writing from the first-person perspective of someone trying to find child care for a child with special needs, journalist Rebecca Gale reported on the summer camp conundrum for parents, which is exacerbated in America by the lack of any federal infrastructure to support parents of young children. There are very limited options for school-age children for child care in the hours when school is not open, and the options for neurodivergent or special needs children who can't readily participate in group environments without additional support is even more limited. Without federal investment in a broader child care system, kids with special needs will have to seek out limited options, or parents will have to take a step away from work to care for them.

Did COVID Break Child Care? Or Was It Already Broken?

A graphic explainer on how COVID-19 impacted child care and why the lack of federal investment has made the U.S. child care system untenable for many.

By Rebecca Gale and Dianne Kirsch (Illustrator), [Early Learning Nation](#)

June 21, 2023

The child care system is complicated, and the lack of federal investment and infrastructure means it is up to individual families to come up with solutions. When child care centers closed during the emergency phase of the pandemic, many parents had no other option and had to curtail, shift, or abandon work responsibilities to care for their children. This became a crisis the country could no longer ignore, especially when women began leaving their jobs citing child care responsibilities as the reason why. But advocates who have studied child care have long understood it wasn't COVID that broke the system, it exposed the broken system for what it was.

As part of our larger storytelling series, this was our first foray into graphic stories to reach a wider audience using different mediums. With minimalist line art and vivid colors, drawn by artist and illustrator Dianne Kirsch, this comic unravels the ripple effect of the broken child care system on working families, child care workers, and employers. By using visual storytelling, each frame carries a powerful message, compelling viewers to reflect on the urgent need for reform and federal investment.

“Beyond the Scope of What They Could Manage”: Navigating Care for Children with Invisible Disorders

For parents of challenging children, the scant child care options mean wage and career setbacks.

By Rebecca Gale, [Marie Claire](#)

July 17, 2023

Journalist Rebecca Gale explored how parents with challenging children can face additional obstacles in securing child care. Without reliable child care—or with anxiety about a child being kicked out of care, camp, or school—parents often opt for jobs that allow for more flexibility but often pay less. Without a federal infrastructure in place for child care, the children who have behavior challenges and require more staffing will be harder to find care for and the parents will have to make arrangements to be more available—often at the expense of furthering their careers or being able to support their families.

A System on Life Support: A Kentucky Town Tries to Save Child Care

A documentary film, selected for the [Social Impact Film Festival](#) in New York and [Bare Bones Music & Documentary Festival](#) in Oklahoma, shows a Kentucky town’s efforts to fund high-quality care.

By Rachel Haeseley

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, about 50 percent of Kentucky was already considered a “child care desert,” meaning there is more demand for the service than there are available spots, and many child care teachers and providers were already earning poverty wages even as strapped parents struggled to afford child care tuition. Kentucky’s already fragile child care sector, like in other states, made it through the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of emergency federal funds from the American Rescue Plan. But with those dollars set to end, child care centers and parents alike are bracing themselves for tuition hikes, potential closures, and teacher shortages. Filmmaker Rachel Haeseley produced, directed, and edited this documentary after becoming a parent during the COVID-19 pandemic and having to navigate the sparse child care landscape in her home state of Kentucky.

With so much at stake and no federal solution in sight, *A System on Life Support* highlights a unique grassroots effort in Owensboro, Kentucky, determined to find a local fix. The Greater Owensboro Partnership for Early Development is comprised of parents, teachers, community leaders, philanthropists, and business partners with one common goal: to not only keep Kentucky’s shaky child care infrastructure afloat, but to find local solutions that will strengthen the system—for good—so our children, families, communities, businesses, and economy can flourish.

Overview of Historic Child Care Wins in Three States: A Series

A series on how three states—New Mexico, Vermont, and Minnesota—expanded funding and access in a push for universal child care.

By Rebecca Gale, *Early Learning Nation*

On Tomorrow’s Ballot, New Mexico Votes on Funding Universal Child Care

November 7, 2022

With \$125 Million Hanging in the Air, Vermont Sets the Stage for National Child Care

June 13, 2023

Vermont Makes Child Care History with a Bipartisan Veto Override

June 27, 2023

Minnesota Makes Major Strides on Behalf of Children and Families

July 25, 2023

Journalist Rebecca Gale created a series documenting state-specific progress on child care as measures passed through the state legislatures and through ballot initiatives. Her stories for *Early Learning Nation* focused on the historic child care victories in New Mexico to expand funding and eligibility for child care through a ballot initiative, Vermont’s expanded funding and eligibility for child care through the state legislature via a veto-override, and Minnesota’s record funding for child care programs throughout the state, including a statewide paid family leave program.

The Lahaina Fires Illuminate Our Immense Unpreparedness of Weather-Related Disasters

A spotlight on care and the vulnerability of young children in an age of climate disasters.

By Haley Swenson, [Early Learning Nation](#)

August 30, 2023

Better Life Lab fellow Haley Swenson reported on the Maui wildfire disaster and its impact on young children and the child care sector in Hawaii. Swenson interviewed local Maui child care providers and advocates about their needs following the fires and highlighted their critical efforts to support children and families. Swenson also interviewed national child care policy expert Elliot Haspel on how the lack of federal funding and infrastructure for young children leaves them particularly vulnerable to climate disasters.

Conclusion

In disseminating funds directly to reporters to support their news coverage of child care issues, we found that these grants extended the reach of care stories to new audiences, gave journalists the flexibility to report on aspects of child care innovation that might not have otherwise been captured, and elevated the voices of a wide variety of reporters on the topic—both experienced and novice. Part of our larger mission of narrative change requires both a widening and deepening of the storytelling field. Expanding our efforts to include diverse mediums, publications, and a deeper bench of reporters will help us further achieve this.

But progress remains. To continue more robust reporting on child care as a policy issue will require further investments of time and resources and the building of a cadre of journalists with deep understanding of policy and the solutions journalism model. To meet this need, the Better Life Lab plans to expand the reporting grants program to curate and cultivate more voices to report on the need for accessible, affordable child care. We have long documented the benefits that come with federal investment in care—for children, families, care providers, and society. While movements to fund care is happening in a handful of states, most are left behind. And so, our work carries on.



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