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Finding the Stable in Stabilization Funding: Quality Care for Children in Georgia Forges a Pathway

By Monique Reynolds

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic and within weeks schools and businesses throughout the US closed their doors. For the next two years, working families—and the child care programs that support them—struggled to adapt to a new world of remote work, daily health checks, unpredictable schedules, supply chain shortages and rapidly rising costs. The federal government offered much needed stabilization funding and—thanks in large measure to these funds—the supply of child care in many states slowly returned to pre-pandemic levels.

However, federal stabilization funding will soon come to an end and child care centers and family child care home providers need to be ready for the change.

Was this funding effective? Is the sector truly stable?

Ensuring that ECE programs are sustainable requires more than public money. Early care and education programs must also revisit their business strategies, understand costs, and craft a stability plan for the years ahead. **Quality Care for Children**, an Atlanta-based non-profit organization focused on ensuring that Georgia has the ECE system it needs to nurture and educate all the State's young children, has been focused on doing just that. Prior to the pandemic, we launched **QCCworks**, a suite of programs, tools and resources that includes:

Business Coaching

A process that includes a baseline assessment, provider-specific action plan, and coaching focused on key business metrics.

Automation

To ensure that every child care business has ***Child Care Management Software*** *and knows how to use it.*

Economies of Scale

To help small child care programs access a ***Provider Resource Hub***, ***business exchange***, *and/or tap deeper administrative services from a* ***back office***; *and a* ***Family Child Care Network*** *to help home-based providers market their programs on-line and manage their businesses efficiently.*

Performance metrics (which are regularly collected by QCCworks coaches) underscore that the approach works. In 2022, the 140 centers and 60 home-based providers that received individualized support from QCCworks experienced, on average, a 39% increase in revenue, a 20% increase in enrollment, and zero bad debt (meaning that all tuition in these sites is now collected in full and on-time). The owners and directors of these sites report that as they worked more deeply with QCCworks, they not only saw improvements in their businesses, but their stress level declined significantly. Maximizing the power of automation also freed up countless hours of time previously spent on repetitive paperwork.

When building budgets, the QCCworks team is careful to coach programs in strategies that base revenue projections on stable, predictable funding and use short-term stabilization dollars on short-term spending. The result is that participating programs 'right sized' their tuition to ensure sustainability, made strategic investments in equipment or expansion, and established reserve funds to help with emergencies. While programs continue to wrestle with recruiting and retaining staff in an economy crippled by the great resignation, limited public investments in ECE, reimbursement rates that are still below costs, and myriad other challenges, these owners and operators feel empowered to move forward, armed with new knowledge, skills and business strategies.

Our nation needs to increase investment in early care and education. Center- and home-based early care and education programs need to revisit their business strategies, understand costs, and craft a stability plan for the years ahead. These are not mutually exclusive goals; they are both essential.

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