



VIBRANT VOICES IN THE VALLEY

A COMMUNITY CHANGING FOR CHILDREN



January 2016

the **cayl** institute
Creating Architects of Change

Contents

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 3 | Introduction |
| 3 | Young Children in the Mahoning Valley |
| 4 | A Community Changing for Children |
| 5 | Vibrant Voices in the Valley |
| 6 | Where We Stand: Consensus About the Direction of Change |
| 7 | Where We Stand: Consensus About the Barriers to Change |
| 8 | Where Do We Go From Here? |
| Appendices | |
| 9 | Appendix A: Mahoning Valley Quick Facts |
| 14 | Appendix B: Vibrant Voices in the Valley Participants |





Introduction



Every community faces the challenge of how to adequately invest in young children, particularly children under five, as they typically have neither universal delivery systems, nor the level of public investment that older children enjoy. This challenge is even more pronounced in relatively low-resource communities, such as Ohio's Mahoning Valley.

Once a prosperous steel town where blue collar jobs offered high wages and stability for families, the Mahoning Valley was devastated by 1977's Black Monday, the day the steel boom ended. The situation was further aggravated by the subsequent demise of various manufacturing and other industries in the following decades. The resulting economic decline was unprecedented, leading to a 30-year cycle of

massive losses in jobs, population, and an overall diminished quality of life for residents.

Part of the beautiful Appalachian region, the Mahoning Valley is in northeastern Ohio, located between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Through the determination of committed citizens, many paths to economic recovery have been designed. Most impressive is the strong array of civic and volunteer activity, particularly concerning the needs of the region's young people. The Mahoning Valley is home to about 30,000 children under the age of six and about 135,000 residents under the age of 18. More and more, citizens realize that economic revitalization must include realizing opportunities for young children to flourish and thrive.

Young Children in the Mahoning Valley

Mahoning and Trumbull Counties



Trumbull and Mahoning counties, part of the Mahoning Valley, have rising poverty for children under age six. Access to high-quality early care and education is restricted to small geographic areas with limited numbers, and for many children constitutes a patchwork of systems and supports. (For more information on population, demographics, and supply of programs, please see Appendix A.)

A Community Changing For Children

Among many efforts to revitalize a focus on children in the Mahoning Valley, The Raymond John Wean Foundation supports many initiatives aimed at strengthening family and community life. Among these efforts, The Raymond John Wean Foundation has partnered with The CAYL Institute (CAYL) since 2010 to create shared learning experiences and build community among elementary school principals in several Mahoning Valley school districts.

CAYL's focus is on practice, policy, and partnership:

- **Practice.** Over 250 local early educators have received professional development. Principals in Lakeview Local Schools, Warren City Schools, and Campbell City Schools have been provided with intensive support.
- **Policy.** In our work with principals, there has been an emphasis on reducing kindergarten retention, creating a regional preschool-to-school transition form, and constructing a common calendar to support families in these highly transient communities. Sustaining gains is a challenge in view of Ohio's 3rd grade Reading Guarantee.

- **Partnership.** CAYL has been instrumental in bringing principals and community-based early educators together for substantive, useful, and transformative adult learning experiences. One example of a major collaborative community-based effort is the Kindergarten Readiness Summit, held annually since 2012, which brings together the Mahoning Valley's kindergarten teachers, family child care providers, center-based and community-based providers, the local Head Start network, and mental health consultants and support systems. The Summit has been influential in aligning the community's practices and procedures regarding kindergarten transition and implementation.

The work accomplished in the Mahoning Valley is of national interest. Several local leaders were recently profiled in *The New Early Childhood Professional*.



Vibrant Voices in the Valley

As schools and early educators explore how to build stronger relationships with each other, it is recognized that families and community-based agencies are a key component of sustainable change in the Mahoning Valley. In 2015, CAYL organized a series of conversations titled Vibrant Voices in the Valley to listen to and learn about collaborative leadership for children in the Mahoning Valley. Specifically, eighteen organizations and their family partners have been participating in a process of analysis, planning, and preparation to strengthen family engagement within the broad spectrum of programs and services that support young children and families.

With the engagement of a wide variety of community-based leaders (See Appendix B), Vibrant Voices in the Valley included two major foci:

- **Analysis** of both family engagement and early care and education in the Mahoning Valley, including a review of national and state trends and best practices.
- **Development of recommendations** and ideas for action, as well as methods to guide and accelerate progress toward a coherent system of high-quality early care and education and family engagement in the Mahoning Valley.

Through a multi-faceted approach, these community leaders focused on building their capacity to work individually and collaboratively using a four-step change model: Analyzing, Advancing, Acting, and Accelerating specific strategies, tools, and cohesive plans of action that support family engagement and critical community issues individually and collectively.



Where We Stand

Consensus About the Direction of Change

Vibrant Voices in the Valley echoed three themes that have emerged over the past five years that CAYL has heard from elementary school leadership and superintendents, local business leaders, the child care community, and various community stakeholders:

First, there is agreement about **the challenge**: a greater focus on the needs of young children, with an emphasis on family engagement, is a key (yet too weak) component of community revitalization.

Second, to address this challenge, Vibrant Voices in the Valley participants articulated four basic principles for change:

- **ALL children.** A focus on ALL children and more emphasis on a “whole child approach” to child development, rather than considering the child in parts (academic, social, recreational, etc.).

- **Strength-based.** An approach to working with families that emphasizes an individual’s autonomy and abilities, and highlights the resiliency and resourcefulness of individuals rather than their deficits; engaging families as partners rather than ‘educating’ them.
- **Cross-cultural competence and respect.** A necessity to break down walls of separation which may have historically existed in the community.
- **Collaboration and transparency.** Recognition that community-building must be intentional and transparent.

Third, there is consensus that families need more information about and access to services. Vibrant Voices in the Valley asks, *“If we, Mahoning Valley community leaders, know so little about the work that each of us does, how much more challenging must access be for families?”*





Where We Stand

Consensus About the Barriers to Change

The impressive efforts generated within the community are important beginnings. Nevertheless:

- **Voices for children are fragmented and relatively small**, often represented by a patchwork of pilot projects and specific initiatives with loose connections to the community and other organizations. Many efforts are weakly connected with established institutions such as schools, and rely on inconsistent funding and volunteers.
 - **Collaboration is limited and diluted** as local organizations lack the financial or human resources for cross-organizational efforts.
- Further, too many low-capacity efforts are structured and invested in silos. There are numerous parallel projects within the Mahoning Valley working toward the same or comparable goals, and with limited collaboration or communication between project leaders.
- **Family engagement is not optimal** in all of the local systems and governances that support young learners (birth through age eight). Families with young children often do not function as essential partners with systems that support and provide services to young children and families.
 - **Critical gaps** exist in availability, quality, and access to supports for children and families.





Where Do We Go From Here?

The CAYL Institute, with The Raymond John Wean Foundation's support, has worked independently with schools and with community partners in the Mahoning Valley. It is time to bring them together to create powerful, sustainable, and effective change for children. Addressing the concerns expressed by schools and the community will require an ongoing multi-year regional effort. We recommend the establishment of a specific birth-through-third grade structure that will:

- **Coordinate and engage** families of young children, specifically around the elementary school structure.
- **Communicate** with the broader community about the status and needs of young children.
- **Stimulate, align, and coordinate** services between family child care, community child care, preschool programs, community-based programs, and the public systems.
- **Accelerate** attention to issues of access and quality.



More and more, citizens realize that economic revitalization must include creating opportunities for young children to flourish and thrive. In Vibrant Voices in the Valley, leaders have articulated the need to **P.U.S.H.:**

- **Promotion.** The Mahoning Valley needs to increase and improve services for young children. We must support the access to higher quality services and supports and advance community will for sustaining young children.
- **Unity.** Community-based organizations and established institutions must work together on a comprehensive vision and plan for young children in the Mahoning Valley.
- **Shared voice.** Intentional efforts must be designed to embed the active voices of families into all systems that support young children.
- **Hope.** Making the Mahoning Valley a stronger place for children and families is the best hope for revitalization in the region.

Join us as we work to strengthen family engagement and stronger services for children and families in the Mahoning Valley!

Mahoning County

Quick Facts



for every

Accredited, quality-rated, Early Childhood Education (ECE), or Preschool Special Education (PSE) program space



for every

Early learning and development program space

Total population under 6 years

15,319

% of children economically disadvantaged

55%

% of children living in poverty

30%

% of children under age 6 in accredited, quality-rated, ECE, or PSE programs

47%

ODE licensed preschool sites

26

ODE-Licensed site enrollment (children under 6)

1,042

ODJFS-Licensed center enrollment (children under 6)

3,796

Total Head Start enrollment

963

Total Early Head Start enrollment

40

Trumbull County

Quick Facts



for every

Accredited, quality-rated,
Early Childhood Education (ECE), or Preschool
Special Education (PSE) program space



for every

Early learning and development
program space



Total population under 6 years

14,062

% if children economically
disadvantaged

60%

% of children living in poverty

35%

% of children under age 6 in
accredited, quality-rated, ECE,
or PSE programs

40.3%

ODE licensed preschool sites

21

ODE-Licensed site enrollment
(children under 6)

608

ODJFS-Licensed
center enrollment
(children under 6)

2,501

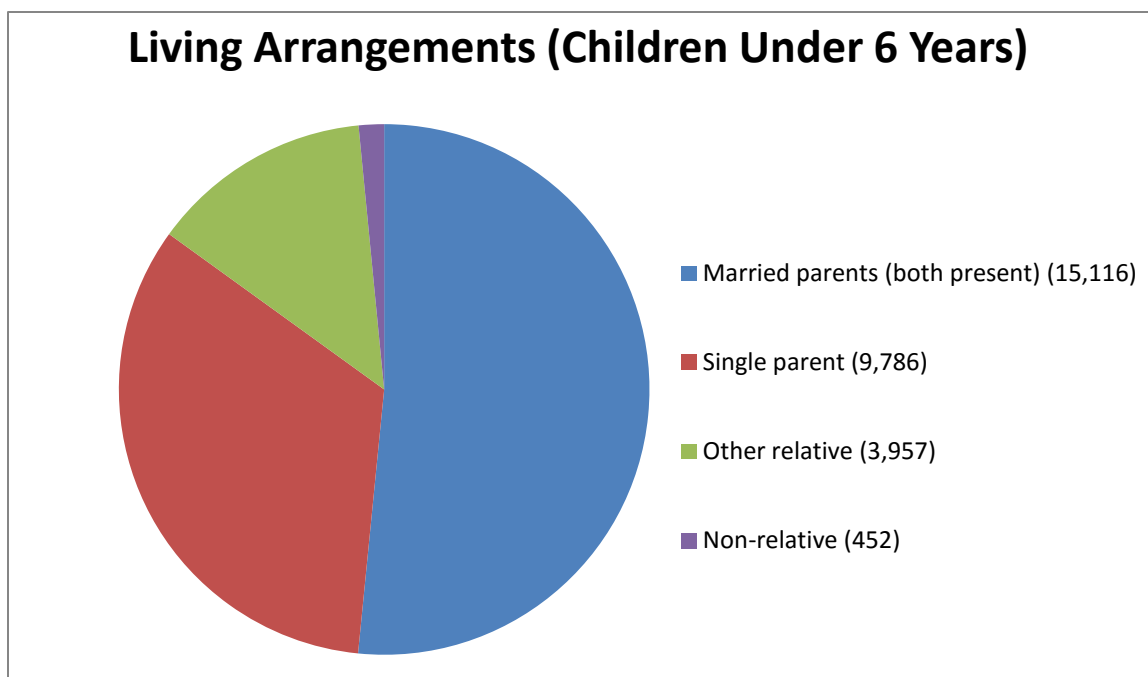
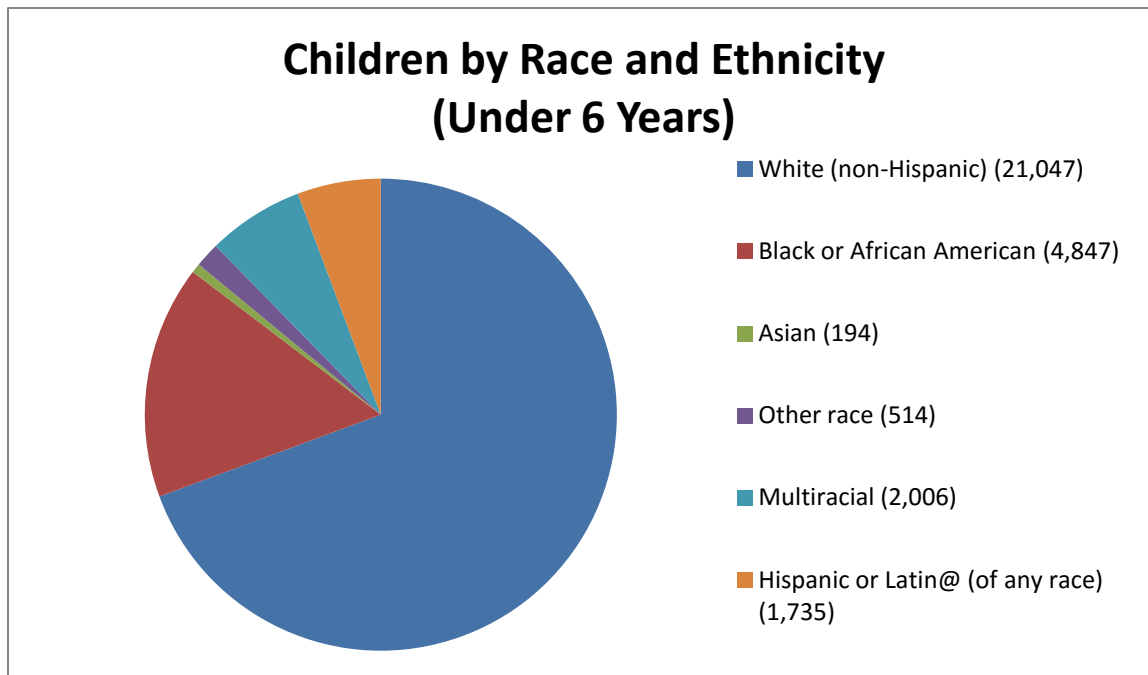
Total Head Start enrollment

669

Total Early Head Start
enrollment

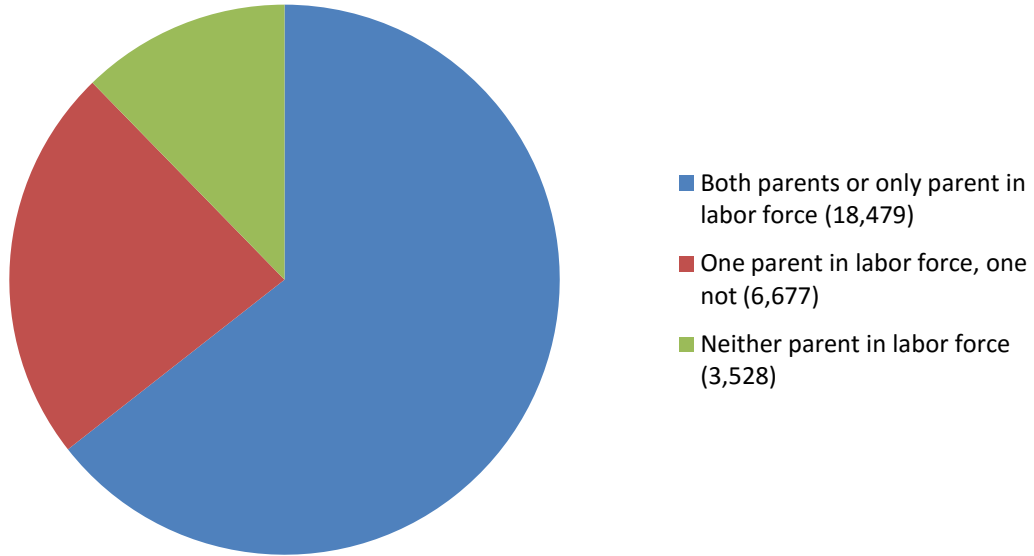
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Quick Facts: The Mahoning Valley (Trumbull and Mahoning Counties)

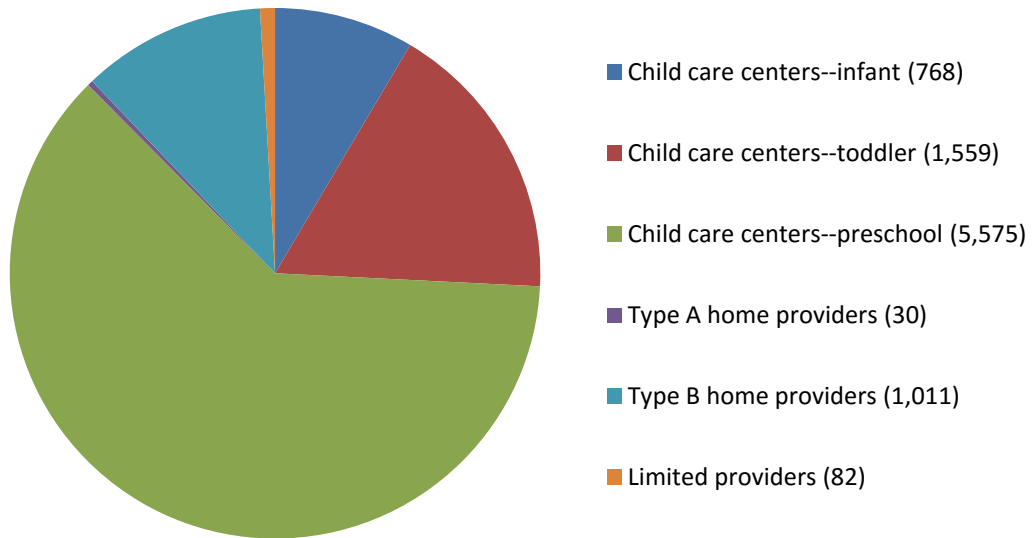




Parental/Familial Employment (Children Under 6 Years)

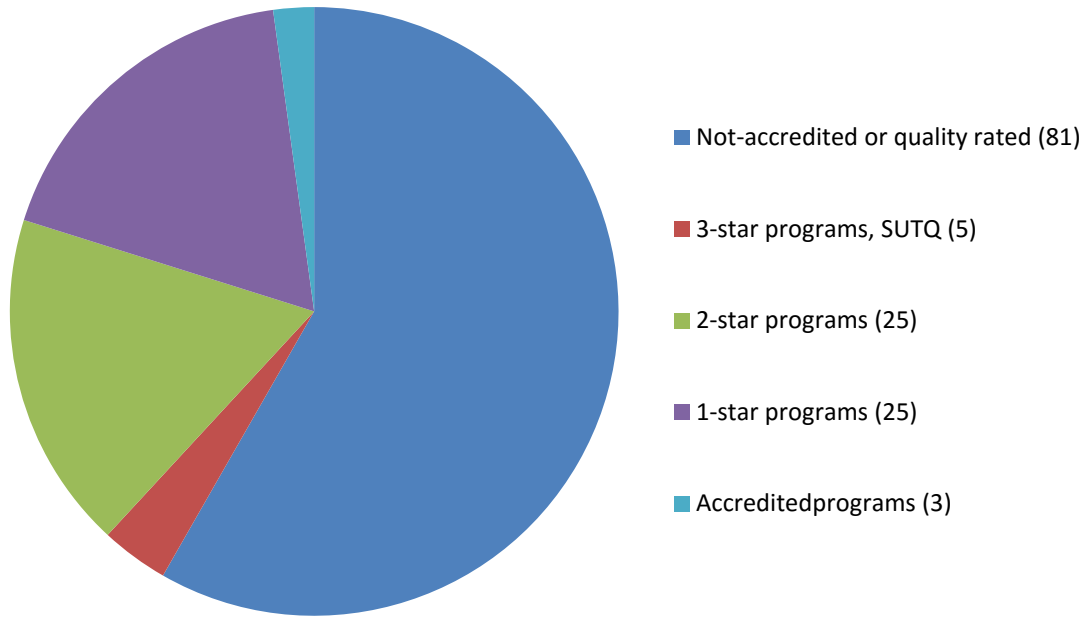


Total Child Care Spaces

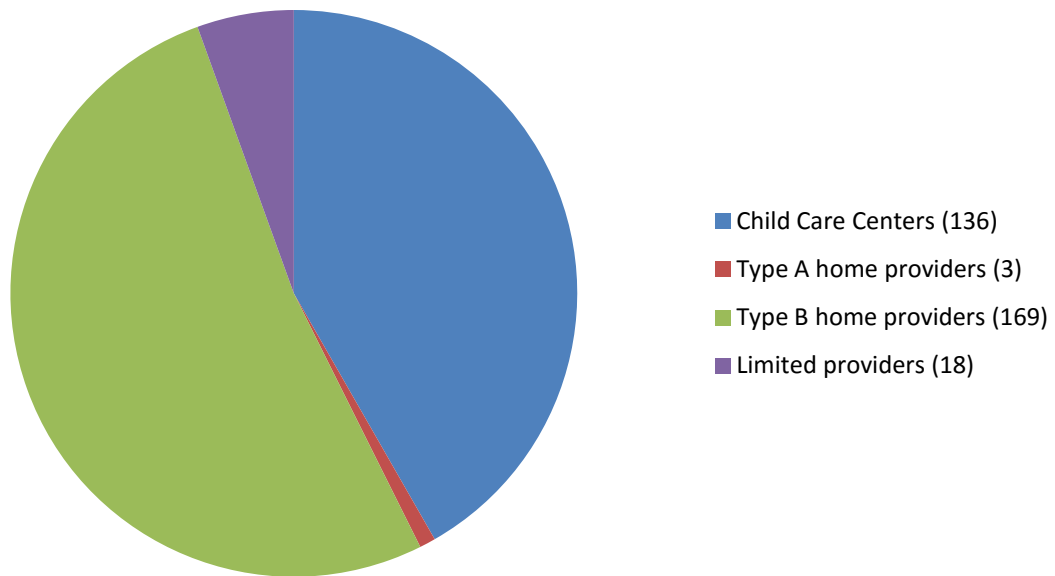




Program Accreditation and Quality-Rating



ODJFS Certified/Licensed Providers



Vibrant Voices the Valley Participants

Alexander, Margie

Family and Children First Council, FCFC Coordinator

Bush, Mary Beth

H.A.P.P.Y. Homes, Secretary/Treasurer

Colbert, Amanda

Colberts Care, Executive Director

Family Partner

Crump-Walker, Kimberly

Restoration Christian Fellowship Church, Co-Pastor

Family Partner

Domitrovich, Laura

Trumbull Mental Health and Recovery Board, Children's Program Officer

Edington, Paulette

Executive Director, Trumbull Family Fitness

Furniss, Teresa

Tru-Mah-Col AEYC, Vice President

Martin, Matt

Trumbull Neighborhood Partnership, Executive Director

Matthews, Taylor


Family Partner

Matlock, Roger

Inspiring Minds, Site Coordinator

Perrino, Pamela

Perrino Consulting, Early Childhood Advocate



Sanders, Kiisha

Team Sanders Inc., Executive Director
Family Partner

Shockey, Carrie

The Ohio State University, Extension Program Assistant
Family Partner

Shaw, Stephanie

Eastern Ohio Education Partnership, Executive Director

Shope, Darleen

Trumbull County Childrens Services, Supervisor of Investigations and Alternative Response

Stringer, Brittainy

Family Partner
YWCA of Warren

Stringer, Kevin

21st Century Community Learning Centers/We Are Warren Initiative
Warren City Schools, Program Coordinator

White, Renda

Inspring Minds, Site Coordinator

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Someplace Safe and Solace Center - Trumbull County, Director of Domestic Violence and
Visitation Services



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