



**A message from  
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and  
Mary Jo Kilroy, Dewey R. Stokes and Paula Brooks  
Franklin County Commissioners  
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Five years ago, a group of people in Franklin County began an ambitious, comprehensive initiative that focused on our youngest citizens. Called Start Smart, the early care and education initiative is led by Franklin County and the United Way of Central Ohio. In its first five years of operation, Start Smart made significant progress in improving our programs for early care, both in centers and home settings.

The idea behind Start Smart is to raise standards of early care and education, so that our youngest children are better prepared for kindergarten. Children who enter Kindergarten ready for school have a better chance at graduation and success in life.

Start Smart's comprehensive approach addresses early care on several levels. By helping child care providers improve their skills and service, by helping parents with creative ideas for learning, or by helping public policy leaders to know more about the unique needs of young children, Start Smart has raised the bar in Franklin County.

Recognizing the positive and critical difference that Start Smart is making, Franklin County, the United Way of Central Ohio and the Columbus Foundation will continue the commitment to Start Smart so that this important work can carry on, following the initial phase of the initiative.

Following is information on the progress of Start Smart, nearing the end of its fifth year:

**Accreditation:** Child care centers and homes that are nationally accredited offer the highest standards of early care and education. Gaining this award can take up to two years and requires many hours of intense self-review, improvements, and credentialing of staff.

Of Franklin County **home providers**, currently 115 are working toward accreditation and three have earned the distinction.

Of Franklin County **centers**, currently 245 are working toward accreditation and 67 have earned the award.

**Nationally only 8 percent of child care centers are accredited. Franklin County exceeds that average with 17 percent of child care centers now accredited.**

**Credentialing & Training:** Start Smart reimburses early childhood workers who have successfully completed coursework in child development at local universities and colleges including Columbus State Community College.

To date, 929 single class scholarships have been awarded. Eleven students have earned a Bachelor's degree, 38 earned an Associate's degree and 14 earned a Child Development Association national credential.

**Director's Institute:** In addition, 219 child care center directors have attended an "Institute" of special trainings designed to provide advanced instruction on early childhood curriculum and center management.

And the **Home Providers Institute** has welcomed 67 home providers for advanced training.

**Building Capacity in Homes and Centers:** For the parents of babies and toddlers, finding a place for quality early care and education is a challenge. Spaces are few and waiting lists are long. Start Smart is building capacity in centers and in home settings. To date, 278 new homes have started the business of quality early care, creating 660 new spaces. In addition, 104 infant and toddler spaces in child care centers are subsidized and equipped through Start Smart.

**Community Awareness & Parent Education:** Materials to help parents with creative ideas for learning activities are available for free from Start Smart. A web site includes more than 100 activity tips, a calendar of events, parenting links and a directory of local services for children. Visit [www.startsmartcolumbus.org](http://www.startsmartcolumbus.org) to learn more. More than 33,000 booklets of activity tips have been distributed. Booklets are available in English, Spanish and Somali with the third printing of the English version currently underway. Call **23-SMART** to request a booklet.

In addition, a new awareness project aimed at helping parents to find good, safe child care was launched in year five. Thousands of guidebooks, wallet cards and magnets, focused on good, safe child care are distributed to parents through Franklin County and the United Way.

**Funding:** Start Smart is funded through public and private sources. To date, \$3,493,738 have been provided through county and state funds. Private sources have donated \$5,510,436. Thank you to our funders and supporters!

***Find out more!!***

Please visit Start Smart online at [www.startsmartcolumbus.org](http://www.startsmartcolumbus.org). To receive a free Start Smart activity tips booklet, please call **614-BE-SMART or 614-237-6278**.

## Start Smart – Review of Goals and Milestones

- **From February, 2001 to June, 2005, Start Smart has, for most objectives, met 100 percent of the five-year goals, and for other objectives has met nearly 100 percent of the goals. Following is a breakdown:**

<b>Five-Year Goal</b>	<b>Years 1,2,3,4 and part of 5</b>	<b>% of 5-Yr Goal</b>
652 spaces created for babies & toddlers, 466 in homes & 69 in centers	660 spaces created	101%
900 students in training courses	929 enrollments in coursework	103%
225 directors trained	219 directors trained/retrained	97%
131 homes on accreditation path	115 home engaged (3 awarded)	88%
246 centers on accreditation path	245 engaged (67 awarded)	99%
78 sites with mentoring services	78 sites received mentoring	100%
Community awareness	Directory, Peer training, guidebook	100%

- **Prior to the creation of the Start Smart initiative, the quality of child care in Franklin County was not on a fast track for improvements. Start Smart has been the driving force behind many positive changes in early care and education and has accelerated the progress of early childhood.**

<b>Levels at 2000</b>	<b>2005</b>
Accredited Home Providers – 0	3
Accredited Centers – 7%	18% (67 centers)
Director Training – few inconsistent programs	Directors Institute – 219 Directors trained
Mentoring services to homes and centers, few	78 sites received mentoring services in first 2 yrs
Credentialing – some help from FCDJFS & Cols State	More than 900 scholarships for courses awarded

- **Some of the major accomplishments of Start Smart include:**
  - Doubled the number of accredited pre-schools
  - Provided much needed advanced training and organization to directors of early care centers, pre-kindergarten teachers and child care workers
  - Renovated space and created more than 660 new spaces for babies and toddlers in high need neighborhoods
  - Improved quality of early care and education for more than 10,000 children to date through training and technical assistance
  - Provided “tools” to parents and caregivers to assist with early learning (web site and booklets)

➤ **One of the initial challenges of Start Smart:**

The 1999 demographic data indicated a need for more than 3,000 infant/toddler spaces in high need neighborhoods; Linden, Northland, Whitehall, Southside and Hilltop. Start Smart initially committed to creating 1,000 new spaces in high need neighborhoods in a 5-year period. After the loss of state funding, the goal of 652 spaces was made.

➤ **Start Smart is supported through public and private funding.**

The funding translates to better service and quality of life for young children and their families. To date, Start Smart has been able to create 620 spaces in high need neighborhoods for quality early care and education. This translates to more than 800 families better served in those neighborhoods. Throughout Franklin County, children and families are better served through better trained directors, teachers and staff; quality parent education materials to help with early learning; and improved facilities and curriculum through accreditation.

## **Five-Year Evaluation of Start Smart Shows Progress, Finds Support for Initiative to Continue**

The Start Smart early care and education initiative was started on a solid foundation of local and national research about the needs of young children. Throughout the initial five-years, from 2000 to 2005, Start Smart maintained that commitment to periodic measurement to ensure the initiative was making a difference in critical areas of early care.

As the first phase of Start Smart transitions to the second phase, Start Smart again is turning to research and measurement to ensure a continuing quality approach.

*The Start Smart Evaluation Report* was prepared for the United Way of Central Ohio by R/K Dawson and Associates. It was presented to the Start Smart steering committee on July 20. The evaluation examined Start Smart's progress, lessons learned, and challenges and considerations for going forward.

After a research period that included personal interviews, a survey, analysis of activities and services and a review of the origins of Start Smart, the research team reported the following:

### **Progress and Factors of Success:**

- Start Smart has had significant impact on the quality and availability of child care for young children in Franklin County.
- Start Smart has led to the creation of more quality child care facilities – with an emphasis on spaces for 0 – 3 year olds.
- Start Smart emphasized quality and led to better trained providers by promoting and supporting accreditation, credentialing and other training and mentoring.

- Start Smart has increased the funding to support quality child care in Franklin County by bringing together public and private funds and allocating them to support quality child care.
- Start Smart has increased collaboration and fostered coordination in a generally fragmented service area, including a significant public/private partnership.
- Start Smart has been less successful in expanding the awareness of the need for quality child care among the general population, and in securing more public funding for child care for young children.
- Start Smart has resulted in United Way working with agencies and other funders in some new ways – more proactive and prescriptive in working towards national performance standards.
- Those interviewed about Start Smart overwhelmingly agreed it is vital for the initiative to continue because they believe it's making a difference, that much would be lost if it stopped and that more time is needed to bring about the big changes Start Smart is addressing.
- Some of the factors that contribute to Start Smart's success include that it: builds on existing efforts and structures, allows broad participation and credit sharing and maintains a positive community climate.
- Other factors enabling success include: flexible use of private funding, use of performance standards, willingness to adapt to changing conditions and the initiative's focus on being a community effort, not a United Way project.

### **Initiative Strengths:**

- Researchers recorded what activities and approaches worked well for the initiative. These include: the importance of flexibility, strong staffing and infrastructure, the need for regular assessment to ensure components are working as a whole.
- In addition: placing qualified people in the right positions, staying consistent with brand identity and planning for the long-term for ongoing sustainability.

### **Considerations and Challenges for the Next Phase:**

- Moving forward, the researchers focused on some considerations and challenges including: more attention to the birth to three age population, more priority on parent education and health, better efforts to build the brand and associate Start Smart with the services and activities it sponsors.
- Additional considerations and challenges include: more on-going tracking of participants, continue to align efforts with United Way Vision Councils, marketing and resource development, and explore how Start Smart's services and activities will be sustained over the long run.