



Annual Report

May 2023

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I: Summary

The Early Learning Initiative (ELI) continues to adapt to the changing and challenging child care environment through developing new and innovative programs to support the community.

ELI -

- Connected with more families than any other year by supporting enrollments and care needs beyond scholarship recipients, serving as a liaison to the complex process for Burlington families.
- Increased accessibility through a newly branded and fully translated website, digital forms, additional translated materials, and more deliberate outreach to the diverse Burlington communities.
- Introduced the Language Access Grant, reimbursing child care programs for interpreter and translation costs.
- Launched a new workforce development training program with Let's Grow Kids to bring new educators into the field by upskilling Burlington residents and providing programs with trained, employable staff.

Indicators of Success, 2018-2023

Success Indicator	Outcome Measure
More children in high-quality child care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 189 applicants since 2019 • 164 scholarships offered over 4 years • 147 scholarships accepted for an 90% enrollment rate • 45 children enrolled as of May 2023 • 23 families left care over the last 4 years
Total public funding pulled into the child care community through First Steps Scholarship families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 2019, \$1.45 million in state funding and \$768,000 of local dollars paid into the community for the first 4 years of First Steps Scholarship • Year 4, through August 2023: estimated \$237,000 of local dollars spent and \$490,000 of state funding
High-quality child care is available for children eligible for scholarship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 87% of applicants were offered a space • From 2018-2021, 46% increase in child care capacity funded through grants (high-quality infant/toddler); creating 3 new child care centers and 120 new spots • 50% increase in First Steps Scholarship partner child care programs
Families have better economic well being	<p>For Year 4, 2022-23 Scholarship Year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57% of families are single parent households • 83% of families need child care to stay or find employment • 11% of families qualifying under the 80% area median income range
Young children are more prepared for Pre-K and Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% of scholarship recipients stayed enrolled through four scholarship years • Enrolled children had attendance rate of 77% of open days, from Sept 2022 to March 2023

II: Creating A More Accessible Community Program

New ELI website and branding

The Department of Business and Workforce Development Marketing Manager and ELI Manager collaborated to create a new cohesive and recognizable brand for ELI and the First Steps Scholarship Program. The design has been used throughout all marketing and communications.

Two logos were created – one for the Early Learning Initiative (ELI) and one specifically for the First Steps Scholarship Program.



In addition, a new ELI website – earlylearningbtv.org – was created to provide a landing pad for all ELI programs, not previously available to the community. Families, child care providers, and community partners all utilize the site. It can be translated into eight major languages spoken within Burlington – Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, French, Nepali, Swahili, and Vietnamese – making it more accessible to the area's families.

As of May 2023, website visits include:

- 1,126 total site visitors and 2,374 page views
- 89% new visitors and 11% returning visitors
- The majority of users visit the family information page
- Languages used: 95% English; 2% Chinese; .4% Spanish; .3% German; .09% Bosnian

ELI also digitized the First Steps Scholarship application. To date, 30% of all applications, 18 total, have been submitted in this new manner. Families have appreciated the familiar and accessible option. The application will be moved to the City's Open Gov database for Year 5 Scholarship Year. The paper/PDF version of the application is still available and used often.

Reaching all Burlington communities

Similar to other City programs, ELI strives to reach the most people and ensure all constituents know about available programs. It is imperative that information is spread far and wide, through avenues most familiar to all communities. To do this, ELI worked across City departments to connect with our diverse populations.

ELI met with the Trusted Community Voices (TCVs), managed by CEDO, throughout the year. The TCVs were insightful and suggested new ways to spread the word about ELI, most specifically the First Steps Scholarship Program. In previous years, scholarship information flyers were presented in English with limited translated blurbs on the reverse side. The TCVs suggested translating the entire document so all families could have access to the same information. The City's Language Access Plan funded the translation work. These fully-translated flyers have been distributed by the TCVs throughout the community.

A TCV member also suggested speaking about the scholarship program on his radio and local TV show. Both engagements were successful and helped spread the word to those who may not have known previously.

Expanding marketing efforts

In addition to making information and programs more accessible to families, ELI increased marketing efforts throughout the area. A more substantial marketing campaign has advertised programs to a wider audience. ELI purchased print ads in Seven Days, Seven Day's Kids VT, and North Avenue News. Digital ads have included web banners on Kids VT website and Facebook and Instagram ads.

Marketing information:

First Steps Scholarship Program advertisements in

- Seven Days Kids VT in March, May, August and November.
 - Kids VT prints 45,000 four times a year and targets ELI most sought after market including parents, grandparents, care-providers and educators
- Digital web banner on Kids VT in March/April
- North Avenue News in February and June
 - 17,000 issues circulated monthly
- Facebook and Instagram digital ad in August and November 2022
 - 5,487 reached, 131 clicks

- Front Porch Forum posting to all City neighborhoods in August and November
 - 20 neighborhood forums with 19,998 members

Early Childhood Education Training Program

- Print ad in March Seven Days
- Facebook and Instagram digital ad in March 2023
 - 7,318 reached, 206 clicks
- Front Porch Forum posting to all City neighborhoods in April
 - 20 neighborhood forums with 19,998 members

III: First Steps Scholarship Fourth Year, 2022-2023

The fourth year of the First Steps Scholarship Program has remained steady and continues to see strong numbers in applications, enrollments, and partnering child care providers. Enrollment looks similar to the previous year even with staffing shortages limiting available enrollment spots. This speaks to the strong partnerships with providers and their willingness to prioritizing First Steps families. ELI has also stepped into the realm of supporting non-scholarship families navigating the child care environment. It is a complex system with many different programs, various organizations, and numerous paperwork requirements.

As of May 2023, First Steps has supported the child care needs for 72 children, including First Steps Scholarship applications and placement; connecting older siblings and/or families not eligible for scholarship funding to preschool and afterschool programs; working with families to enroll in Head Start programs; offering advice and instruction for CCFAP; and linking families to other social services. An additional twelve children not eligible for the scholarship program have been helped to find care and navigate the enrollment process.

The Fourth Scholarship Year by the Numbers:

- 60 total applications - 41 new families and 19 returning from Year 3
- 45 families enrolled in Year 4, a total of 92% offered and accepted enrollment spaces
- 10 families wait listed as of May 2023, the program's longest running wait list.
 - There have been between 7 and 10 children on the ELI wait list throughout Year 4.

- 50% increase over Year 3 in partnering child care programs
 - 24 partner child care programs in 5 towns - children currently enrolled at 16 programs
- 83% of First Steps families need child care to remain employed or find employment
- 20% of applicants' primary language is something other than English, with 7 different languages reported
- 57% of ELI families are single parent households
- 89% of First Steps families qualify at 65% area median income, with 11% of families qualifying between 66% and 80% area median income
- 6 families have unenrolled from care throughout the scholarship year, due to reasons such as moving out of the area, lack of transportation, changes in family care needs
- Estimated \$237,500 investment for the scholarship year spanning September 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023, with an average annual scholarship of \$5,280

Increased number of partnering child care providers

The tight labor market and educator shortage has been a widely recognized issue within the child care landscape for years. Unfortunately, this is causing providers to make the difficult decisions to decrease enrollment, close classrooms, or even close entirely. This continues to put pressure on the number of available care slots in the area. To address this issue, First Steps expanded the number of child care programs partnering with the City. To date, ELI has signed contracts with 24 providers in Burlington, South Burlington, Williston, Essex, and Colchester, increasing partners by 50% over Year 3. Children are currently enrolled at 16 providers, four more than last year.

First Steps Scholarship rates for Scholarship Year 4, 2022-2023

By design, the First Steps Scholarship layers Burlington funds on top of the state-funded Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) to make high-quality care truly affordable. The maximum scholarship tuition of \$416/week remained the same after a mid-Year 3 increase in February 2022, but the delivery model adjusted slightly to make tuition more affordable for families.

- Families qualifying at or below 65% AMI: Tuition is fully covered to the weekly maximum of \$416 through a combination of scholarship dollars and CCFAP.
- Families qualifying between 66% and 80% AMI: Tuition is covered up to the weekly maximum of \$416 through a combination of scholarship dollars, CCFAP, and a family copayment capped at no more than 5% of the family's weekly income.

The ELI team is currently considering tuition rates for Scholarship Year 5. While specific totals will be determined in the coming weeks, it is expected maximum scholarship tuition will follow inflation trends increasing about 5%.

Increased annual income limits

As expected, the area median income limits increased in 2023. HUD released new income numbers in May 2023, with totals increasing by another \$4,000 to \$6,600 for the Burlington area. This will continue to expand ELI's reach to more families.

April 2023 Federal Low-Income Limits – 80% area median income

Family size	2 people	3 people	4 people	5 people	6 people	7 people
80% area median income	\$72,700	\$81,800	\$90,950	\$98,150	\$112,700	\$119,950

IV: Increasing Capacity and Addressing Needs of the Child Care Community

Throughout the year, two different organizations considered submitting ELI Capacity Grant applications but staffing fears proved to be too difficult and these applications have been postponed. The City recognized the hardship of the current environment and created new programs to support Burlington families and the child care community in innovative ways.

ELI Capacity Grants are available and will be of focus in the coming year to encourage growth and opening of new spots in the City. It is expected that the passage of the 2023 Child Care Bill in the State will result in an increase in the already high demand of child care.

Child care program current needs and the educator shortage

Similar to last year, the child care sector is still experiencing staffing shortages. Many have been trying to fill vacancies for more than a year and are finding different strategies to remain open and offer high-quality care to families. This continues to influence all aspects of the ELI program, resulting in the longest running First Steps Scholarship wait list of 10 children. To better understand the current needs of partner programs, ELI asked providers to complete a survey in the spring of 2023. The exercise hoped to provide insight into how programs are handling the current environment and ideas on how the City can best support them. Continued expansion and growth within the industry is important but it's also vital to keep existing programs and workforce strong.

Of the 24 partners surveyed, 17 providers responded. All but one had current staff vacancies and 60% had more than one open position. Many of the programs reported two to four open positions, following a trend reported on by a VTAEYC survey completed in 2022. That survey found programs had an average of 3.1 positions open and many seem to be in the same position as a year ago. Within just the responding partner programs, 33 positions are currently vacant.

First Children's Finance of Vermont also conducted a state-wide survey in February 2023. They found that on average for each open educator position 3.6 enrollment spots are left vacant. Throughout the state, 30% of programs are under-enrolled due to staffing issues and ELI partner programs are more affected, with 65% of programs not fully enrolled. Programs are using all options available to adjust to the lack of teachers – reducing daily hours, closing classrooms, limiting enrollment, closing programming entirely, etc.

It is obvious the child care sector is in great need of trained teachers. It is also important to ensure the existing teachers feel supported and encouraged to grow. Responding programs stated more accessible trainings are needed. ELI plans to offer trainings to partner programs throughout the year including in-person CPR/First Aid; trauma informed care; infant/toddler focus; diversity, equity, and inclusion; creative curriculum; among others.

Early Childhood Education Training Program

With the known educator shortage in the child care community, ELI partnered with Let's Grow Kids to offer a pilot training program aimed to bring new people into the field. The Early Childhood Education Training Program launched in May 2023 with seven

participants. The First Children's Finance survey found that 96% of programs with employees report that hiring new staff is difficult, so this program was designed to both upskill Burlington residents for a fulfilling career in child care and offer programs new educators trained and ready to work in classrooms.

The program was designed to offer the required trainings with wraparound supports for participants to successfully complete the work. Trainings include:

- A 3-hour CCV college course – Introduction to Early Childhood Education, which also connects the students to CCV and a college advisor for future opportunities.
- A 2-session offering of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Early Childhood Education
- Introduction to Northern Light Individual Professional Development Plan and Bright Future Information Systems
- Pediatric CPR and First Aid
- Basic Specialized Care
- Mandated Reporting
- Medication Administration
- Emergency Response Training
- Infant and Toddler Series
- Resume and Employment Application Training

Participants will be eligible for a \$900 bonus at the completion of the full course.

Training not fully enrolled will also be offered to employees at First Steps Scholarship partner programs. The Department of Business and Workforce Development's new role of Workforce Development Manager is also working on this project and looks to expand on this idea in the coming months.

Language Access Grants

The ELI Language Access Grant launched in February 2023 providing programs support for language translation and interpretation costs. It is imperative programs effectively communicate with all families, but the cost can be a significant burden on tight budgets. These grants were created to ensure providers would not have to limit their abilities to connect with families. Details of the program include:

- Grants are available to all Burlington child care programs and First Steps Scholarship partner programs located outside of Burlington
- Individual grant maximum of up to \$800/project
- Programs can apply for up to 3 projects in a 12-month period for an annual maximum of \$2,400

- Costs must have been incurred after January 1, 2022
- Funds administered through a reimbursement model

The City received positive feedback when the program launched with many praising the project and expressing interest. It is expected to fill a need not being covered by the state or other available funds. To date, ELI has paid out one grant of \$800 to ONE Arts Community School – Burlington.

IV: State-Level Changes: 2023 Child Care Bill and future of ELI

The Vermont State Legislature made history in May by passing the 2023 Child Care Bill. This bill is set to dramatically impact the child care sector and push Vermont to the national forefront. The bill will infuse \$125 million annually by supporting programs, the early childhood education workforce, and families. This kind of long-term, sustainable funding will drastically change the child care landscape and stabilize the state's workforce and economy creating a more affordable place to live and raise a family. As a leader in the nation, this kind of support could be a pull to bring new residents to the state. Changes going into effect over the next two years will influence ELI and the City will pivot to support the industry in new ways. As many are expecting, demand will increase significantly once care is more affordable for families. The City will be ready to support the growing capacity needs.

The importance of ELI's progress and work within our community was evident when legislators asked for a more in depth look at the City's work. The ELI Manager testified to the Senate Health and Welfare Committee in February on how the First Steps Scholarship supports families and child care programs and fills known gaps of the state tuition assistance.

The First Steps Scholarship Program has been a major component of ELI since 2019 and was meant to fill a need until the state system was better funded. The state is nearly there and the City is working to adapt to the changing environment and determine new, innovative ways ELI can be of service. Specifics of the state bill that will most affect current ELI work are listed below.

- More families will be income eligible for CCFAP - Estimates of 7,450 more children and families
 - April 2024 – Families making 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL) will be eligible. Family of 4 making up to \$120,000 annually. (Current eligibility is 350% FPL).

- October 2024 – Families making 575% of the FPL will be eligible. Family of 4 making \$172,500 annually.
- CCFAP reimbursing rates will increase
 - July 2023 – All programs will receive the reimbursement rate of 5-STAR programs regardless of STAR rating.
 - January 2024 – Reimbursement rates will increase by 35%, upwards of \$470/week
- Readiness Payments begin Summer 2023 to help program stabilize and prepare for the anticipation of added demand with increased CCFAP funding.
 - Specifics are still be determined, but these will more than likely be paid through a formula.
- On-going capacity building and quality improvement work in the future
 - Minimum pay standards for educators coming in the future
- Funded through a new payroll tax of 0.44% going into effect July 2024

The City has been at the forefront of this effort. The local dollars paid into the system have impacted families and providers, alike. ELI programs have influenced other municipalities around the state and illustrated how additional public investment can impact the system. The passing of this bill is a huge win for Vermont, child care providers, and families. ELI will continue to work with our partners and families to ensure a smooth transition to this new system and support the community in new ways.

Appendices

- A. Capacity Grant Program Totals, 2017-2023
- B. ELI First Steps Scholarship informational flyers
 - a. Arabic
 - b. Bosnian
 - c. Burmese
 - d. English
 - e. French
 - f. Nepali
 - g. Swahili
 - h. Vietnamese
- C. Print ads for marketing purposes
- D. Digital ads for Facebook and Instagram

Appendix A:

Capacity Grant Program Totals, 2017-2023

Center & Grant Award Year	Total spots	Funding totals
ONE Arts Community School – Burlington - 2021 (new child care center)	28 spots, 16 infant/toddler and 12 preschool newly created	\$103,676.61
Next Generation – Burlington (new child care center) - 2020	18 infant and toddler newly created	\$19,200
Champlain Valley Head Start (new child care center) - 2019	23 infant/toddler and preschool newly created	\$90,849
Fletcher Free Library - 2019	50 students reached at home-based centers	\$17,300
Pine Forest – 2018 & 2019	69 stabilized and future expansion planning	\$50,000 (2 grants)
Burlington Children's Space - 2018	51 stabilized through building ownership	\$150,000 (2-installments of \$75,000)
YMCA - 2018	38 newly created	\$130,000
Sara Holbrook Community Center - 2018	8 newly created	\$150,000
Full Circle Preschool – 2017 & 2018	4 newly created	\$19,000 (2 grants)
Robin's Nest - 2018	46 improved by teacher/director certification	\$10,275
The Family Room - 2018	Community center stabilized; CCFAP start	\$45,000

Appendix B: ELI First Steps Scholarship informational flyers

- a. Arabic
- b. Bosnian
- c. Burmese
- d. English
- e. French
- f. Nepali
- g. Swahili
- h. Vietnamese

Appendix C: Examples of print ads for North Ave News and Seven Days

North Ave News



**Childcare is complicated.
We're here to help.**

If you are struggling to pay for childcare,
your child may qualify for Burlington's
First Steps Scholarship.

This program is available for Burlington residents only.

Learn more at earlylearningbtv.org



Seven Days



**Considering a career in early
childhood education?**

We're here to help you start strong.

Apply for our **FREE college-level training
program** to jumpstart your career in
childhood education.

This program is available for Burlington residents only.

Ready to start a new career?

Submit your name and email to us at
webportalapp.com/webform/ecetraining



Appendix D: Examples of digital ads for Facebook/Instagram and Seven Days

Facebook/Instagram



EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE **LET'S GROW KIDS**
CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL

**Considering a career in early childhood education?
We're here to help you start strong.**

Apply to our **FREE college-level training program** to jumpstart your career in childhood education.

Attend our info session on zoom
Tuesday, April 11th to learn more!

This program is available for Burlington residents only.



Seven Days



EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE
CITY OF BURLINGTON

**Childcare is complicated.
We're here to help.**

If you are struggling to pay for childcare, your child may qualify for Burlington's First Steps Scholarship.

Learn more

This program is available for Burlington residents only.

