



Giving Voice to the Concerns of a Broken Child Care System

GRANTEE: RIVERFRONT CHILDREN'S CENTER, GROTON

Imagine you're the director of a nonprofit early childhood center. You're charged with educating and caring for 130 babies and toddlers at the most vital brain development stage of their lives. How would you do it?

There are a few caveats: Nearly all the families you serve work to lift themselves up the economic ladder, yet earn low incomes. And teachers are leaving the child care sector in droves, since many can find more flexible, less physically taxing jobs — with higher pay — elsewhere.

Jennifer Zubek is that director, and she attended the June listening session in Norwich with Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood Commissioner Beth Bye, co-hosted by the Community Foundation.

Zubek runs the Riverfront Children's Center in Groton (*pictured*), a high-quality early childhood center drawing families from Norwich to Ledyard to New London. She attended the session, like other providers, to share the concerns of her center and its families.

Riverfront has been unusually creative in giving children the best start they can possibly have. Quality, robust early education, says Zubek, "sets children up for their whole lives."

To meet its challenges, Riverfront fundraises year-round to subsidize fees for nearly all its families. It rents out extra space to raise program income. It stocks an on-site food pantry. Its families swap used children's clothing. Riverfront didn't raise fees for 10 years. It covers a big chunk of its employees' health insurance, pays all staff more than the typical hourly wage, and offers professional development.

Most people have no idea what early education and child care centers like Riverfront do to survive. That's why, Zubek said of the listening session, "It was nice to be able to have a voice and call attention to some of the issues."

She appreciated the fresh perspectives. "It was interesting to ask businesses for their opinion, because sometimes, as providers, it's easy to look at challenges rather than the possibility for solutions. It was encouraging to see where their new ideas will go."

Leveraging our voices.



The strain of the last several years on struggling residents and the organizations that support and serve them has been devastating. The pandemic brought to light numerous broken or ineffective systems that had been under the radar for far too long.

In many ways, our communities are in more dire straits now than they have

ever been. According to the most recent ALICE data from Connecticut's United Ways, one-third of working households in our 42-town region earn less than the "survival budget." That is why the Community Foundation has taken a more active role in advocating for legislation to lift people out of poverty. We now better understand how working on systems change can address the root causes of the problems we are facing. If we have learned anything over the past three years, it is that, as a community, we can surmount any challenge when we pool our resources and leverage our voices.

Our role at the Community Foundation — in addition to putting philanthropic dollars back into the communities we serve — is to listen carefully to residents and our partner organizations, both of whom have on-the-ground experience living with and trying to overcome the complex drivers of poverty. In this issue, you'll see the crucial value of listening to and sharing the wisdom of nonprofit leaders and local experts.

We believe listening is at the core of designing creative solutions to community problems. It fuels our collective will and power to advocate — with a unified voice — for policy changes, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

Warmest,

Pesident & CEO

The Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut

VISION

A healthy, thriving, sustainable Eastern Connecticut with greater equity for all.

MISSION

Collaborate with partners to put philanthropy into action to address the needs, rights and interests of our community in Eastern Connecticut.

VALUES

Integrity, Equity, Respect, Courage, Empathy

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Published twice yearly, *Compass Points* aims to inform and engage our donors and community partners across Eastern Connecticut.



Join Us in Welcoming Two New Trustees

The Community Foundation is thrilled to welcome Catherine Marrion and Morgan Tuck to our Board of Trustees in 2024.

Catherine (*left*) is an attorney with Waller Smith & Palmer in New London. Morgan (*right*) is the Assistant General Manager & Director of Franchise Development for the Connecticut Sun.

They have both served on our committees and bring valuable experience and perspectives to our organization!



Building a Trusted Bridge to Better Health

GRANTEE: HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER, NORWICH

Alyssa McClain vividly recalls the moment six years ago. While at a health clinic at a shelter for people experiencing homelessness, a man told her he was recently diagnosed with stage four cancer. Then he asked, “How many stages are there?”

McClain, now the executive director of the Norwich-based Health Education Center (HEC), says vulnerable people like him — disproportionately Black, Hispanic, or earning lower incomes — often suffer worse health outcomes because they’re overwhelmed by our complex health system.

“A lot of the people we see don’t understand their diagnosis when they leave a doctor’s office,” McClain reported.

“Sometimes they only had 15 minutes with a doctor, or there was a language barrier, or plain language wasn’t used. Some people can’t deal with the stress and complexity of all the paperwork or insurance. So it’s hard for them to understand, ‘What do I do next?’”

HEC has an answer: community health workers who can bridge the gap between the doctor’s office and patients’ lives. States around the country are investing in these workers based on research showing their effectiveness in reducing health disparities.

“Our community health workers are from the communities we serve,” McClain said. “They understand health care. They can connect people with resources, explain better, and help them follow through with paperwork, appointments, and calls about their health.”

Community Foundation grants are boosting HEC’s training efforts so it can grow its network of 40 community health workers across Eastern Connecticut, in places like soup kitchens and elderly housing communities.

According to McClain, trust is key, particularly where one’s native language isn’t English.

“There are pockets of Polish immigrant populations in Windham County,” McClain explained, “and some of them, after going to a doctor’s appointment, seek out one or two community members that they trust. They ask them, ‘What is happening? What does this mean?’ And that trusted person is a perfect candidate for our community health worker program. They’re trusted and already doing the work, so let’s train them and get them paid.”

Photo: Health Education Center’s community health workers bridge the gap between the doctor’s office and patients’ lives.



With Your Help, Responding to Racial Inequities

FUND FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

When chairperson Lee-Ann Gomes convenes the Community Foundation's Fund for Racial Justice grants committee to review applications, she's mindful of the enduring pain caused by centuries of racial injustices.

Gomes, who retired after working in human services for 36 years for the City of Norwich, saw the impact up close.

According to Gomes, "Black and Brown people are disproportionately represented in low-income communities, which are also often food deserts. With limited access to affordable and nutritious food, their diets suffer. And when you're poor and in communities with high violence and stress, jobs are hard to find and child care costs are through the roof. You're physically, emotionally, and psychologically beaten down. And that leads to a lot of health disparities, including higher rates of diabetes and hypertension for Black and Hispanic people."

The Foundation's Fund for Racial Justice was established in 2021 to advance racial equity, support racial justice organizing and advocacy, and provide flexible resources to organizations and movements led by people of color in Eastern Connecticut.

In thoughtfully considering grant awards from the Fund, Gomes says, "We aim to give agencies, municipalities, health centers, and other nonprofits the ability to address disparities systematically to make the playing field fair for everyone."

In 2022, the Fund's volunteer committee of community leaders, led by Gomes, awarded the first round of grants totaling \$205,000 to 24 grantee organizations. The generosity of donors made it possible. Now a permanent endowed fund at the Community Foundation, it will award grants annually to community nonprofits.

"We're proud of the achievements our country has made towards racial justice, but we have more to do," Gomes said.

Learn more and donate to the Fund for Racial Justice at cfect.org/F4RJ. Please join us to reach our \$1 million endowment goal!



Top photo: A grant to Norwich Public Schools focused on Racial Advocacy and Community Service Learning.

Inset photo: Lee-Ann Gomes introducing grantees of the Fund for Racial Justice during "A Conversation on Racial Justice Work" at the Garde Arts Center in June.

Four Questions for Our Board Chair, Peg O'Shea, on Creating Brighter Futures for Our Region's Children

BRIGHTER FUTURES FUND

An educator since 1969, Dr. Margaret "Peg" O'Shea of Old Lyme has been a teacher, principal, reading consultant, administrator, and college professor. She and her husband Dan are enthusiastic supporters of the Brighter Futures Fund, established at the Community Foundation in 2023 to advance equitable outcomes to improve the lives of children and youth. Here's what she had to say.

Q. What is meaningful for you about the launch of the Brighter Futures Fund?

"I feel a nation like ours should measure our worth and nobility by the way we nurture our children. This Fund will turn donations into grants in 42 Eastern Connecticut towns — and it's *all* to care for our children."

Q. What concerns you most about children today?

"Eleven million children in this country live in poverty — one in seven are children of color. Boosting family income correlates with greater parental emotional well-being. And if parents feel better, they are doing a better job raising their kids. School attendance is better, reading scores are higher, and high school graduation rates improve. And as those things work for children, they have better health outcomes as they get older."

Q. As an educator, what do you see as the most pressing issues in schools right now?

"It's pretty clear that kids have suffered tremendously during the pandemic. Some statistics show that kids have lost up to two years of educational attainment. And school attendance is terrible now because kids got used to not going to school, particularly middle and high school."



Q. What would you say to people who are considering a gift to the Brighter Futures Fund?

"Marian Wright Edelman, the former head of the Children's Defense Fund, said, 'Service to others is the rent we pay for living.' Dan and I feel it is incumbent on us, as two people who have flourished in this country, to try and help others who haven't had it so easy to flourish."

Learn more and donate to the Brighter Futures Fund at cfct.org/BrighterFutures. We are thrilled to have a \$300,000 challenge match from a generous family of donors to help us reach our \$1 million fundraising goal!

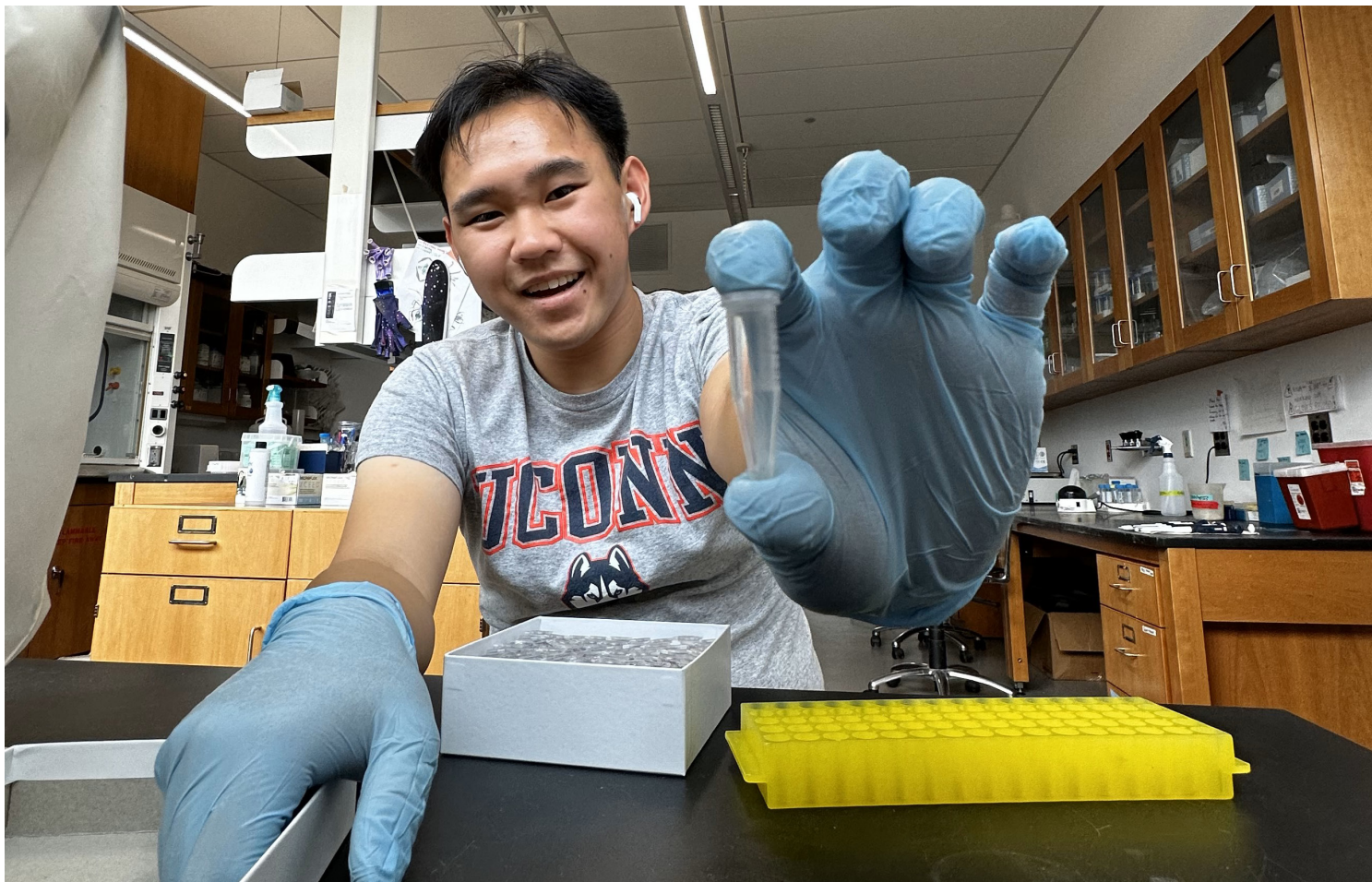
Top photo: Peg and Dan O'Shea with their grandchildren.

Bottom photo: A recent Community Foundation grant funded experiential STEM education aboard Project Oceanology's research vessel.

Brighter Futures Fund

*Established in 2023
to advance equitable
outcomes to improve
the lives of children
and youth in Eastern
Connecticut.*





“I want future students to know I understand their struggles...”

BEATRICE MCEWEN SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

Norwich's Ruiwen Lin (pictured), is a junior at the University of Connecticut. A recipient of the Beatrice McEwen Scholarship, he recently wrote this note to us:

Thank you so much for your continued support of my education. This scholarship means a lot to me and my family. As a first-generation college student, I often feel lost since my parents can only provide me with a limited amount of support, but this award shows that there are other people in the community who want to help me succeed and achieve my dreams.

In the future, I plan on becoming a professor of molecular biology since I believe that education is the most powerful tool that anyone can wield.

My goal is to educate other first-generation students and to provide support and guidance they might need. Any major in the STEM field is difficult and I want future students to know I understand their struggles and am more than willing to help them achieve their dreams.

I have received awards from the Community Foundation in the past and I am always grateful for the continued support of my education to help guide me on my college journey!

– Ruiwen Lin, '25
University of Connecticut

Learn more about the Community Foundation's scholarships at cfect.org/scholarships.

YOUR GENEROSITY AT WORK! 2023 COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

\$1,009,838
FROM 131 SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

287
RECIPIENTS

50 MULTI-YEAR AWARDS
RANGING FROM \$8,000 TO \$32,000

Supporting Programs that Uplift Communities in Disproportionately Impacted Areas

Putting \$1 million in funding from the Connecticut Social Equity Council to good work!

In June of this year, the Community Foundation was awarded a grant from the Connecticut Social Equity Council (SEC) to implement a community reinvestment program in Eastern Connecticut. This pilot project focuses on communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs in our region — New London, Norwich and Willimantic/Windham.

Funding is exclusively focused on reentry and reintegration programs that support formerly incarcerated individuals and their families, and for youth education, recreation and arts programs that help promote physical and mental health wellness and empower young people in the future workforce.

We are excited to share our grantees from this pilot project!



Alliance for Living | \$75,000

Peer Navigators to support New London participants and link them to resources.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of CT | \$20,000

Support one-to-one youth mentoring in Willimantic/Windham.

Castle Church | \$50,000

Use art, design and entrepreneurship to foster unity among young people in Norwich and inspire them to use their own gifts to create their future.

Community Level Up | \$50,000

Mentoring and youth development for New London youth.

Connecticut Legal Services | \$40,000

Outreach and direct legal services regarding housing, education, subsistence and/or employment benefits to residents of New London, Norwich and Willimantic/Windham.

Connecticut Pardon Team | \$5,000

Assist seniors age 55+ from New London, Norwich and Willimantic/Windham to apply for an Absolute Pardon.

Eastern Connecticut State University - Center for Community Engagement | \$65,000

Expand a mentoring and tutoring support program in the Windham Public Schools.

Hispanic Alliance of Southeastern Connecticut | \$30,000

Theater and filmmaking program for middle and high school students from New London and Norwich.

Madonna Place | \$80,000

Expand Fatherhood Initiative to support fathers who have been incarcerated.

NAACP of Connecticut | \$75,000

To connect justice-involved residents of New London, Norwich and Willimantic/Windham with quality jobs through the One Million Jobs Campaign.

New London Homeless Hospitality | \$85,000

Provide flexible financial assistance to those recently released from prison.

New London Youth Affairs | \$50,000

Expand youth employment and training opportunities for teens age 14 and 15.

Norwich Youth & Family Services | \$25,000

New rugby program for Norwich high school-aged boys.

Perception Programs | \$100,000

Comprehensive case management and recovery housing.

Project Imo | \$50,000

Development, leadership and employment skills for high-risk Willimantic/Windham youth.

Public Library of New London | \$25,000

Youth enrichment programs for positive youth development.

Sankofa Education & Leadership | \$40,000

Arts program with social and environmental justice focus for New London and Norwich youth.

S.T.E.P.S. | \$35,000

Expansion of enrichment activities to provide programs on weekends for young women and their families.



Community Foundation
of Eastern Connecticut

68 Federal Street
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Build a Fund at the Community Foundation

Did you know that you can create a permanently endowed fund and build it up over time? You can start a fund and add to it over 3-5 years to reach the \$10,000 minimum (\$25,000 for scholarships). You can then add more as circumstances allow.

A long-term plan might include a legacy provision in your estate plan or naming your fund as a beneficiary of a retirement plan or life insurance policy.

CONNECT YOUR PASSION TO A PURPOSE

Contribute to your own or an existing fund and/or promote your Community Foundation's work through these funds:

- **Fund for Racial Justice** advances racial equity, supports racial justice organizing and advocacy, and allocates flexible resources to organizations and movements led by people of color.
- **Brighter Futures Fund** works toward advancing equitable outcomes to improve the lives of children and youth.
- **Community Leadership Fund** helps us to build powerful partnerships that strengthen our region's nonprofits in their work within our priority areas.
- **President's Discretionary Fund** enables us to provide leadership when needed and to back innovative projects as they emerge.
- **Women & Girls Funds** help to empower women and girls wherever you choose in Eastern Connecticut.

Contact Lauren C. Parda, director of development, at lauren@cfect.org or 860.442.3572 for a confidential conversation about achieving your charitable goals through the Community Foundation.