

STEPPING STONES EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENTER

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QUICK FACTS

Nelda Jones, Executive Director/President

License Capacity 40 children

Ages 15 months – 6 Years

11 Staff Members

Chicago Public Schools, Illinois Action for Children, Head Start and Illinois State Board of Education Child and Adult Care Food Funded Programs

Communities Served: South Shore & Grand Crossing

AGENCY BACKGROUND /ORGANIZATION

Stepping Stones Early Childhood Learning Center (SSECLC)

Corporation was founded in 1997 as a For-Profit Corporation. Our vision is to provide a high quality developmentally appropriate program for toddlers and preschoolers not readily available in low-income areas. Our philosophy is that all children can learn and realize their potential when provided a nurturing environment.

Our mission is to meet the physical, emotional, and social needs of children by offering a safe, stable, and secure environment to nurture and develop positive self-esteem for all of our children. We believe each child is a unique individual. Our primary goal is to service at risk families working or going to school to improve their quality of life.

STATEMENT OF NEED

Our center is one of the few centers in South Shore & Grand Crossing with NAEYC accreditation credentials. High quality child care services are in dire need in low-income communities.

Although the social and economic demographics vary, the need is apparent. The vast majorities of the children in the communities we serve are at risk and live below the federal poverty guideline. The median household income is approximately \$16,246. This community has more than 75% single parent households, with a large number of parent's not finishing high school. The unemployment rate is well above the national average. Low birth rates due to premature and/or inadequate parental care are a major concern in this community.

It is imperative that our program continues because we have a strong parent resource network which provides referrals for many social and health needs in the community funded by state and federal agencies.

We encourage parents to use our literacy and math activities lending libraries to encourage parents to read and work with their children before they enter the public schools. One of our goals is to make parents and children life-long learners. Children must be prepared to become global citizens to compete in the information age in which they live. We have become an integral part of this community, and most of our referrals come from former clients and their families and friends.

POPULATION SERVED

The communities we serve (South Shore, Grand Crossing primarily, Hyde Park, Woodlawn, Park Manor, and Chatham clients frequently request our services) are in serious need of an affordable, high quality child care facility. Most of our families live below the federal poverty guidelines and are subsidized through federal section 8 vouchers for housing, TANAF for food subsidies, as well as child care subsidies from Illinois Department of Human Services.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

There are three classrooms at SSECLC. We have two 15 months - two years old classroom with a 1:4 for 15 – 24 month old children and a ratio of 1:6 for 24 – 36 month old toddlers. There is one 3-5 classroom with a 1:10 ratio.

Stepping Stones Early Childhood Learning Center provides opportunities to participate in a wide variety of activities including pre reading/literacy skills, science, math, social studies, nutrition, science experiments, French, computer literacy, music, and arts & crafts. *Creative Curriculum* drives these program activities. Illinois Early Learning Standards are also incorporated into our curriculum. Our program emphasizes family support and involvement with activities such as parent committees, Parents As Teachers curriculum, daily staff-parent communication, parent workshops, and monthly parent meetings.

Stepping Stones Early Childhood Learning Center provides the opportunity for our children to participate in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities to provide additional educational exposure and enrichment. Many of these enrichment activities are provided through field trips and guest visitors.

The majority of our children test into selective enrollment schools. We consult with parents and assist them in completing “Options for Knowledge” applications. This process starts in October of each year.

During the school year, public & private high school students contemplating careers in Early Childhood Education perform service learning hours at SSECLC.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS & ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

All of the teachers have 30 or more college credit hours and are currently pursuing a Bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education if they do not have one. Our Director has an Infant/Toddler Certificate from Erikson Institute as well as a level III Illinois Director Credential. She holds an Ed.D in Special Education Administration and completed a Leadership/Supervision cohort at the University of Illinois Chicago campus.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Relevant research indicates that most effective early childhood programs involve parents in meaningful ways. Our center strives to develop working partnerships between teachers and parents that will benefit our children. Some of the activities used to develop this relationship include:

- Open house for all parents every September
- Daily interaction between parents/staff
- Encourage parents to volunteer
- Parent Bulletin Boards
- Parent Handbooks
- Parent Monthly Calendars
- Distribute and evaluate parental satisfaction sheets annually
- Referrals to social service agencies (city & state)
- Annual Family Ethnic Day
- Bi-Annual Report Card Pick-up Night/Progress Reports
- Bi-Annual Home Visits
- Community/Agency Resource Binder for referrals

Parent involvement and community participation that we have initiated are:

- Monthly Parent Meetings
- Reading Is Fundamental Program
- Collaboration with Shell Oil Community Training Center
- CPS High School Community Service Program
- Speech Referrals
- Ada S. McKinley Head Start Collaboration
- Local Area Network Referrals

Referrals are made for our parents for services we don't provide using our community resource binder. Our collaboration with Head Start has presented a wealth of community services and parent training opportunities for our families.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community linkage agreements with local businesses, churches, social services, and hospitals are an integral part of our program. We also have an ongoing relationship with the fifth ward aldermanic office for frequent updates on community activities and resources. Our teachers talk daily with parents either before or after dropping their children off. Weekly/daily reports are prepared and distributed to parents.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development program are provided by Chicago Public Schools, Head Start and Ounce of Prevention. Our professional development also includes using a NAEYC consultant to train us annual regarding NACEY new era standards. These sessions are held on Saturdays for six weeks.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Our Program has been evaluated by Head Start and/or Chicago Public Schools each school year since 2005. Each year our score has risen. The latest scores received in Early Language & Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) were 4.38 in both CPS funded groups. On the Program Administration Scale (PAS) our scores were in the upper percentile. The new kindergarten survey required for CPS, in fourteen out of twenty standards, we scored higher than Chicago Public Schools pre-k program.

We have kept our commitment to our families and the community, and will continue to do so. Providing high quality child care in a licensed facility in our community is challenging. We meet that challenge daily.

Nelda Jones Ed.D, IDC, President

