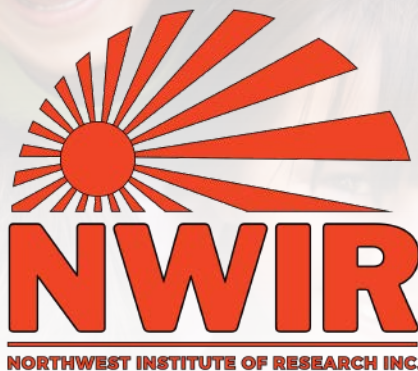




Annual Report 2024

BOARD & STAFF

NWIR, Inc. Board of Directors

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Dr. Philip Belfiore, Ph.D., Secretary
Dr. Ben Wilson, At-large
Elana Como, MS, Early Childhood Studies

NWIR, Inc. Staff

Elana Como, CEO
Stephanie Duda, Vice President & Quality Director
Katie Sullivan, Finance Director
Tyler Behr, Human Resources Director
Steve Krivonak, Development Director

A MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

As we reflect on the past year, we are inspired by the growth of our community. At the Northwest Institute of Research, Inc. (NWIR, Inc.), we remain dedicated to enhancing early childhood education (ECE) and supporting the families and providers who make it possible.

The Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) assisted over 4,700 children by connecting families with affordable, high-quality childcare through the Child Care Works (CCW) program. This vital support enabled working families across Erie, Crawford, Mercer, and Venango counties to achieve their goals while ensuring their children received quality care and education.

Our Provider Services and Quality Coaching Teams have worked tirelessly to help ECE providers raise their Keystone STARS levels, improve educational quality, and increase reimbursement rates through STARS level increases. Our organization helped 15 new providers open locations in all four counties. These efforts ensure more children benefit from high-quality early education.

The JAM Team Foundation, LLC's Miracle Spaces program has also supported providers in creating STEAM-focused environments that encourage development and make learning enjoyable. In 2024, we proudly distributed over \$19,000 in grants to 18 providers, enabling them to transform their classrooms and outdoor spaces. Additionally, our inaugural leadership luncheon brought together over 40 ECE providers, businesses, and community stakeholders, highlighting the power of collaboration that helps our community thrive.

The ECE Learning Alliance provided 82 local organizations with essential resources and professional development. Together, we continue to build a strong network of providers dedicated to offering the best care and education for children.

This past year has been a testament to the power of community, and we are grateful for everyone who has contributed to its success.

Warm Regards,

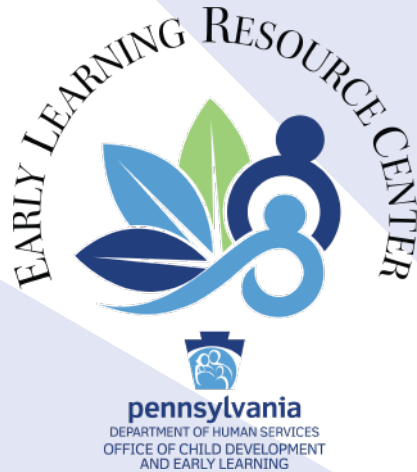
Elana Como

Elana Como
Chief Executive Officer



ELRC FAMILY SERVICES

Our Family Services Team helps families find the best childcare for them, shares information and supports for early learning programs throughout the region, and administers the Child Care Works (CCW) program. CCW helps working families subsidize the cost of their childcare, making it more affordable. Last year, we helped almost 4,700 children enroll in the CCW program throughout ELRC Region 1.



"As a family specialist for childcare subsidies, my job is all about building trust and respect with the families I work with. I'm committed to providing honest, fair, and compassionate support that's tailored to each family's unique needs. Helping parents access important resources means giving them the tools they need to provide for their children, creating stability and opportunities for growth. I also value inclusivity, making sure every family feels welcomed and supported, no matter their background. By working together to find meaningful solutions, I aim to uplift families and help build a stronger community where every child has the chance to thrive."



Lorraine Rodriguez
Family Specialist

"As the Budget Director, my role is to ensure quality customer service for more than 750 regulated and relative providers across four counties. I also ensure that our providers receive accurate and timely payment for the services that they render. The providers serve our communities and are a great resource for them. I want to make sure that they have everything that they need so that they can continue to assist our communities."



Marques Adams
Budget Director

ELRC PROVIDER SERVICES & QUALITY COACHING

The ELRC Provider Services Team is dedicated to supporting the community of ECE providers by assisting with reimbursements through the CCW program and offering quality coaching to help improve Keystone STARS levels—Pennsylvania's Quality Rating Improvement System. A higher STARS level reflects better care and education for children, and providers who achieve a higher level also receive increased reimbursement rates. Over the past year, our Provider Accountant Clerk Team assisted 520 relative and 233 regulated providers with CCW reimbursements.

Our Provider Quality Team made significant strides in supporting the community by helping 15 new providers open locations in all four counties and coaching 23 existing providers to a higher STARS level. The team also organized several professional development events to strengthen the skills and knowledge of providers. Examples include, "Use the Groove," which guided providers to engage children with New American Folk Songs to explore new cultures and improve focus. An Eclipse professional development training provided early learning professionals with the tools to teach children about the science behind a solar eclipse. This activity created a shared learning experience for both children and educators. Through these efforts, our team continues to build a supportive and thriving community of early learning professionals.

THRIVE

Trusting

Helpful

Respectful

Inclusive

Valuable

Empowerment

Our Vision:

“All children, families and communities thrive.”

INFANT TODDLER CONTRACTED SLOTS

The Infant Toddler Contracted Slots Program (ITCSP), funded by the Pennsylvania Office of Child Development & Early Learning (OCDEL), offers significant community and family benefits throughout Region 1. This program helps reduce the wait time for child care subsidies while providing families with access to high-quality care. Eligible children, from 6 weeks to 36 months, can receive care for up to three years in programs with a Keystone STARS rating of 3 or 4, ensuring a nurturing environment with a low teacher-to-child ratio (1:4). Families benefit from no annual redetermination of eligibility, no additional fees for care (other than possible late pick-up charges), and prioritized access to Pre-K Counts. The ITCSP fosters strong, lasting relationships between children and caregivers, promoting continuity of care and supporting families with the resources they need for their children's early development. 108 ITCS are available in Region 1.

RAPID RESPONSE TEAMS

The Rapid Response Team (RRT) offers valuable support to families and child care providers when a child is at risk of suspension or expulsion. This short-term, focused service connects families and providers to the tools and resources they need to address behavioral challenges and improve the child's early childhood experience. By working closely with families and providers, RRT aims to boost the confidence and effectiveness of early childhood professionals, ensuring that children receive positive, supportive care. The team provides customized assistance, including observing the child, gathering information from both family and provider, offering practical strategies, and facilitating follow-up coaching. Additionally, RRT can refer families and providers to other community services to further support the child's development. This service is part of a broader network of resources available to Pennsylvania child care programs, helping families and providers navigate challenges and ensuring that children's needs are met in a nurturing environment. Thank you to our project partners, Barber National Institute, Inc. and Zion Education Center, who are providing consultation to children, families, and providers.



Barber National Institute
Making dreams come true.



JAM TEAM MIRACLE SPACES

The JAM Team Foundation, LLC., a subsidiary of Northwest Institute of Research, Inc., launched the Miracle Spaces grant program this year, strengthening the community of ECE providers! Miracle Spaces empower providers to enhance their STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) classroom environments, enriching the educational experiences of the children they serve. These newly created indoor and outdoor play spaces not only improve the quality of education but also make learning more engaging and interactive. Additionally, they help providers raise their Keystone STARS level, which in turn increases their reimbursement from the CCW program, bringing additional support and resources to many nonprofit and small business providers. Last year, we were proud to distribute over \$19,000 to 18 providers across ELRC Region 1.



COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP LUNCHEON

In May, NWIR, Inc. and the JAM Team hosted our inaugural leadership luncheon, bringing together ECE providers, businesses, and community stakeholders. With over 40 guests in attendance, we shared exciting updates, including our continued management of ELRC Region 1, the expansion into ELRC Region 2, and the successful impact of the Miracle Spaces program. This event highlighted the power of collaboration in building a stronger, more connected community of ECE providers.

"Improving STEAM-based play spaces at ECE providers throughout Region 1 has been a great experience. The dedication and thought that providers put into their applications was very rewarding to see and it's great to see the kids they serve thrive with the new environments. The JAM Team looks forward to launching another round of funding this coming year!"



Steve Krivonak
Development Director

A GLIMPSE INTO MIRACLE SPACES

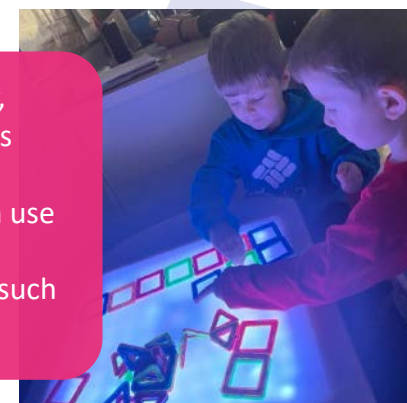
The Deanna L. Anderson Family Child Care Home, located in Erie, purchased a Mobile Learn & Store Activity Station, promoting artistic creativity, language learning, and other STEAM activities.



Brown's Family Childcare, located in Franklin, purchased this outdoor scale, which teaches children about weights, measures, and balance.



RealLife Early Learning Center, located in Erie, purchased this light table, which encourages scientific exploration through use of light and enables learning about many different topics, such as shapes.



ECE LEARNING ALLIANCE

The ECE Learning Alliance is a collaborative network of early childhood education providers across Erie, Crawford, Mercer, and Venango counties. With 82 member organizations, the Alliance fosters a sense of community, promoting the sharing of resources, best practices, and reducing costs to enhance the capacity of each member to provide high-quality care and education to young children.



Over the past year, members accessed valuable resources, such as expert consultations, professional development opportunities, and updates from organizations like the PA Key, PennAEYC, and the Erie County Department of Health. The Alliance hosted numerous professional development events, including Bridges Out of Poverty, Flip It, and the School Age Professional Credential program, helping members enhance their skills.

Members also benefited from online resources like a Director's Toolbox and guides for new educators. Additionally, programs such as Brown's Family Childcare's Nature-Explore Certified classroom and advancements in STARS were celebrated, further enriching the collective knowledge of the Alliance.

"Every conversation shared at the ECE Learning Alliance meetings ignites a spark of growth and collaboration. The dedication of Early Childhood Education professionals in our communities is truly inspiring. Their unwavering support for one another not only elevates the quality of care but also creates lasting, positive impacts for the families and children they serve. I am excited to continue being part of this vibrant culture for many years ahead!"



Stephanie Duda
Quality Director & Vice President

PDO@PASSHE

NWIR, Inc. collaborates with the ECE Professional Development Organization at the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) to offer Child Development Associate (CDA) courses, fostering a strong sense of community among early childhood education (ECE) professionals. The CDA credential recognizes the dedication and expertise of those working to educate children. Through this partnership, 41 students earned their CDA certification from the Council of Professional Recognition, marking a 46 percent increase from the previous year! Credits earned through Pennwest Edinboro are transferable towards various associate, undergraduate, or graduate degrees. Thanks to this funding, NWIR, Inc. is also able to support students by providing essential resources such as laptops, mobile hotspots, and textbooks, which help strengthen their educational journey and are returned upon completion, reinforcing the spirit of collaboration and community growth.



WONDERSCHOOL

NWIR, Inc. partners with Wonderschool to help families find high-quality childcare, while strengthening the business, coaching, communication, and marketing tools available to ECE providers. These tools enable providers to use data and insights to make sound business decisions and gain access to coaching, which can help increase program quality. NWIR, Inc. received a \$300,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education to continue offering Wonderschool to members of the ECE Learning Alliance! This grant also introduces a new avenue for individuals wishing to open a licensed child care home.

Through this grant partnership, the NWIR, Inc. Family Child Care Quality Coach and Wonderschool have collaborated to support individuals seeking to open their own child care program. Participants in Wonderschool's RISE Academy engage in a series of modules to support them in navigating the steps to open a new licensed child care program, and the Quality Coach provides local and on-site support. Upon completion of the RISE Academy, participants are encouraged to create a webpage for their program using the Wonderschool platform.

NWIR, Inc. has connected with and supported 30 individuals aspiring to open their own childcare program. There are now 13 new childcare options for families in Erie, Mercer, and Crawford Counties and two more soon to be awarded their licenses. The Family Child Care Quality coach continues to support 15 people, eight of whom are actively preparing their application for licensing.



IDENTOGO

In October 2020, NWIR recognized a significant gap in fingerprinting services for ECE professionals, which was hindering their ability to secure and maintain employment due to extended wait times for appointments and long travel distances. To address this challenge, NWIR, Inc. collaborated with IdentoGO by Idemia to provide convenient fingerprinting services to the ECE community, as well as other professionals and volunteers, including school and healthcare staff, human services workers, and youth sports coaches. Over the past year, we have successfully served more than 6,700 individuals in our community, including over 600 ECE professionals, helping to support their career opportunities and professional growth.



SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES



NWIR, Inc., through ELRC Region 1, continues to promote *Sesame Street in Communities* to families and providers with resources to help their child grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. WQLN also provided PBS for Kids learning software for newly licensed family childcare homes. The new providers appreciate receiving the PBS iPads to supplement the learning materials they have available for the children's use. Children enhance fine motor, visual motor, and perceptual skills as they use the PBS iPads to explore video clips and music videos, listen to music, create drawings, and engage in educational games.



FINANCIALS

\$32,548,440.65

Assisting 4,700 children with access to 750 regulated and relative providers



Less than 5%
of Income Expensed
Towards
Administrative
Costs

\$3,774,054.00
Administrative Revenue



\$200,000.00

13 new Regulated Child Cares
thanks to Job Training Grant

\$1,738,000.00

108 Infant and Toddlers
served in STAR 4 ECE
Programs



\$100,000.00

Over 30 children avoided being
suspended or expelled thanks to
the Rapid Response Team
partners, Barber National Institute
and Zion Education Center.



\$506,664.45

K2QCQI Grants helped 128 regulated
child care programs to improve,
support, and recognize their quality
achievements.



*Company prepared financial information for FY 23-24

FINANCIALS



\$139,010.00
PDO@PASSHE

Almost 90 ECE professionals attended CDA coursework in partnership with Northern PA Regional College (NPRC)



\$69,500.00

Almost 300 providers, including 82 Alliance Members, received professional development and technical assistance to help maintain or elevate their Keystone STARS Level. 23 programs elevated to higher STARS Levels.

IdentoGO®

\$39,015.00

Almost 600 ECE professionals received fingerprinting services



\$10,000.00

15 individuals graduated through the School-Age Professional Credential Program.

S.T.E.A.M

\$19,220.58

18 providers created innovative STEAM-Based Miracle Spaces

Assets \$7,386,018.00

Liabilities \$3,363,864.00

Net Assets \$4,022,154.00

*without donor restrictions

*Company prepared financial information for FY 23-24

LOOKING FORWARD

2025 marks a golden year for the Northwest Institute of Research, Inc. as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary! Throughout this milestone year, we are excited to host several community events that honor our achievements and the enduring legacy of our late founder, Dr. Joyce A. Miller, culminating in a special 50th Anniversary Gala in November.

While we reflect on our past, 2025 also represents a year of growth and progress. We are thrilled to announce that NWIR will be providing Early Learning Resource Center (ELRC) services to Region 1 for the next five years. Additionally, we are proud to expand our impact by serving ELRC Region 2, which includes Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, McKean, Potter, and Warren Counties, for the next five years. Our newly opened hub in DuBois, PA is already making strides, and we look forward to engaging with the families and providers we serve in this region.

In celebration of our 50th Anniversary, we are also excited to complete our PANO Standards for Excellence® accreditation, ensuring that our policies and procedures uphold the highest standards in governance, management, and legal compliance.

Through the JAM Team Foundation, we continue to advance the Miracle Spaces program, which creates inclusive and STEAM-based play spaces for early learning providers throughout ELRC Regions 1 and 2. This initiative has been further supported by a generous \$35,000 Helping Today grant from the Erie Community Foundation. Additionally, we are making significant progress on the Miracle Micro-Centers project, which blends the best features of childcare centers and in-home care. Stay tuned for more updates on this innovative project in 2025!

We look forward to all that this exciting year holds for our community and the future of NWIR.





In 2024, Northwest Institute of Research, Inc. and the JAM Team Foundation LLC. won The Nonprofit Partnership's "Best Place to Work" award during Celebrate Nonprofits Week!

NORTHWEST INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH

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www.nwir.org**