

Chesapeake R U Ready Youth Coalition
Chesapeake Department of Human Services
Division of Community Programs

Tell us about the project and partnership. Chesapeake R U Ready coalition is made of over 70 youth-serving organizations. Our mission is to align our city’s priorities for youth across city departments, schools, and the many community organizations focused on youth within our city. Through community collaboration, we strive to improve systems and programs for children and families.

The Division of Community Programs within Chesapeake DHS implements the Child Care Subsidy Program and coordinates the Chesapeake R U Ready Youth Coalition. We work to increase the number of Subsidy vendors and slots, enhance child care quality, and stay connected in the community. We see great value in the Child Care Subsidy Program as a community and family resource; the program is often a family’s first point of entry in our doors and gives us a great chance to work with parents, deliver consumer education, resources and a variety of supports while children are young. The research shows that’s when we can make the greatest impact.

How did you identify the need? The Chesapeake Comprehensive Plan for youth is a data-driven document that guides our focus on Early Care and Education, Family Engagement, Out of School Time, and Workplace Readiness. We analyzed kindergarten readiness, PALS scores, high school graduation rates, and other data streams to determine needs, gaps and solutions.

Who are your partners? Chesapeake Public Schools, Health Department, Economic Development, Children’s Hospital of the Kings Daughters, our faith-based community, Great Bridge Rotary, Chesapeake Integrated Behavioral Healthcare, Minus 9 to 5 regional early education initiative, Chesapeake Public Library, local child care centers, Chesapeake Youth Committee, Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, the City of Chesapeake, Infant & Toddler Specialist Network, Child Care Aware of VA, and many more!

What solutions did you brainstorm? Based on data, the Leadership Team developed specific goals for each focus area. For the **Early Care and Education—Enhancing Early Education** focus, we increased access to professional development opportunities for early education professionals, increased access to city resources for child care centers, facilitated child care centers and family day homes to participate in the Early Education Business Mentorship Program and we encourage participation in Virginia Quality. Under the same focus area, we also developed strategies around **Ensuring Kindergarten Readiness**, such as Kindergarten Readiness Workshops, connecting principals to Child Care Centers, providing valuable educational resources to families, and enrollment events.

For the **Out of School Time** focus, our mission statement is: All Chesapeake children should have access to supervised out of school activities that promote positive relationships, learning, and assist in providing skills for school, work and life. Our coalition hosts many professional development and partnership opportunities like our Out of School Time Conference, and we established reading programs in community centers, began educating the community on current after-school opportunities, expanded our summer food enrichment sites and formed new partnerships for book drives, book clubs, and libraries.

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Will you tell us more about the Early Education Business Mentorship Program? For the last five years, over forty child care centers have participated in the Early Education Business Program. This program is in partnership with the Small Business Development Center and Early Education Business Consultants. This is a year-long mentorship program that meets monthly as a cohort and has individual center meetings during the year as well. Our business consultant works with centers on marketing, accounting, timekeeping, enrollment, staffing ratios, starting a business, and program-specific issues. We continue to see great outcomes, with an average of 16% increase in enrollment and revenue. We have also seen less turnover of child care staff. As we continue to offer this year-long mentorship program, we found that many of our centers wanted to continue to network and learn from each other. We offer a Leadership Academy lunch and learn series to meet that need. We are also partnering with Minus 9 to 5, our early education initiative to pilot our first child care center to participate in a Shared Services business model.

What have the outcomes been so far? Good question. We are outcomes-driven so we are always looking at this and tracking outcomes can be difficult. For example, PALS scores are good but not super indicative of impacts. We have looked at home visiting and school programs to see how they track outcomes. We track numbers and types of Subsidy vendors—who are joining or leaving the program and why. How many Family Day Homes are open in the community? We look at barriers and solutions for licensed FDH; we are starting to see a few more open. We look at supply and demand, diversity, equity and how to open doors for families and providers. We track enrollment, revenue, subsidy participation and VA Quality participation.

The best piece of advice? Look for shared value systems for partners. Give groups and volunteers simple ways to connect. Stay visible and engaged. Stay engaged with city and community committees and develop relationships that help to meet common goals. Listen to child care providers, parents, volunteers, and respond to their needs. People are looking for ways to give back and stay engaged, you should look for opportunities to make that easy for them!

