

Educcare

A Catalyst for Change

Ounce of Prevention Fund

Significant research shows that low-income children start school far behind their more affluent peers. Studies also show that healthy social emotional development and language and literacy development are the most critical indicators of future success in school and in life.

The Ounce of Prevention Fund opened its **Educare Center** on Chicago's south side in February 2000 to address the complicated challenge of ensuring that children at risk of failing school enter kindergarten engaged, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed.

Educare: A Better Start

Educare aspires to be both a physical center providing exceptional early education and care *and* a catalyst for change—sparking local and national discussions about enhancing program quality and improving public policies.

Educare provides year-round, comprehensive, center-based developmental child care, education and related services to over 160 low-income children from birth to age five.

Educare is a research-based model that builds on what works: reaching young children early, providing quality individualized care, offering intensive services and focusing, over time, on developing healthy relationships.

Educare's goal is to better prepare young children from low-income families for success in school by nurturing healthy social emotional development and language and pre-literacy skills.

Maximizing the Impact of Educare

The Ounce of Prevention Fund is now partnering with the **Buffett Early Childhood Fund** to assist communities interested in creating high quality birth-to-five programs modeled on the core principles that the Ounce piloted in the Educare Center in Chicago.

Beginning with the 2002 opening of the Educare Center in Omaha, followed by the 2005 opening of the Educare Center in Milwaukee, each new center learns from the previous centers' experience.

The pool of experience continues to expand: an Educare Center in Tulsa is expected to open in 2006 and Educare Centers in Kansas City, Denver and Seattle are expected to open in 2007, along with a second Educare Center in Omaha. Discussions about creating new Educare Centers are underway in additional communities, as well.

To facilitate this shared learning, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the Ounce of Prevention Fund have created the **Bounce Learning Network**. Through the network, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the Ounce of Prevention Fund consult with communities about creating the public-private partnership that forms the foundation for any new Educare Center. The Ounce also provides extensive training and technical assistance on implementation of the Educare model while facilitating peer support and a robust exchange of ideas.

Looking Inside the Educare Center

The Partnership

Using a \$1 million challenge grant from visionary philanthropist Irving B. Harris, the Ounce of Prevention Fund leveraged public investment in the first Educare Center by forging crucial partnerships to better serve low-income children and families. We partnered with the Federal Government (Head Start Bureau), State Government (Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Human Services) and the City of Chicago (Chicago Public Schools) to raise the funds necessary to support the basic operations of Educare. By combining all of the available public funding, we accomplish three fundamental goals: we create a staffing structure that promotes individualized care for each child and family; we offer salaries that attract and retain highly skilled staff from various disciplines; and we provide continuous and comprehensive care, education and support that children and families need on a year-round basis.

Private foundations and individual donors contributed generously to the Educare capital campaign and continue to support the program today. Private dollars are also used to ensure stable relationships among children and caregivers in our infant and toddler classrooms, provide weekly art and music activities to promote social emotional and

language development, and support ongoing program evaluation and assessment efforts to ensure that we are achieving our goals.

Before a new Educare Center is built, a local leading philanthropist, a Head Start provider and the public schools form a public-private partnership. These partnerships promote a shared vision for improving the quality of care for all children.

The Place

The physical center is where the shared vision for quality care and learning for all children, regardless of their income, is realized. The vision that low-income children should have a purposefully designed safe space for learning and growing similar to their more affluent peers is all too rare in our nation. The Educare Center in Chicago is a bold, colorful and unconventional one-story building design, which creates an environment for very young children and their families to feel the safety, warmth and trust that are key to the Ounce's relationship-based work.

The center is deliberately small in scale. Intimate spaces in each classroom enable teachers to provide individualized attention when children need it; larger spaces, including plenty of room for indoor and outdoor play, allow teachers

to facilitate group games that foster healthy development and give time for children to "just be children." At the Educare Center in Chicago, more than half of the classrooms serve infants and toddlers from birth to age three. From the outside, these classrooms resemble individual houses and are constructed to create a sense of community. The exteriors of the preschool classrooms are shaped like schoolhouses and face the neighboring elementary school.

The intentional design of Educare reflects what we know young children need to grow up healthy: safe, roomy, sunny, cheerful and predictable spaces for learning, exploring and playing. But the attractive child-friendly space also serves as a crucial reminder to the children and families we serve that they are worth our investment. Similarly, the bold design inspires policymakers, business leaders and other visitors that this work—and the families we serve—have value.

Through the Bounce Learning Network, each Educare Center is able to learn from our shared experience and incorporate new ideas about how architecture and interior design affect healthy growth and development. As a result, each new Center has a spectacular building that reflects the needs of its community to best serve low-income children and families.

Educare Center of Chicago



Photo: © Hedrich-Blessing

Educare Center of Omaha



Photo: © RDG

Educare Center of Milwaukee



Photo: © RDG



The Program and People

Educare combines early education and child care in a new way that attempts to build on the best that child care, preschool and Head Start offer. Educare is primarily focused on:

- promoting social emotional, language and early literacy development;
- developing stable and supportive relationships between children, families and staff;
- maintaining high requirements for staff education levels;
- reaching families as early as possible during the prenatal period with *Doulas*—specially trained home visitors who work with pregnant teens to strengthen parent-child relationships;
- providing immediate and ongoing child outcome assessment data, enabling staff to offer individualized instruction and continuously strive for program improvement.

Educare staff members are highly trained and educated. A team of teachers—a Lead Teacher with a bachelor's degree, an Assistant Teacher with an associate degree and a Teacher's Aide with a high school diploma—staffs each classroom. All have completed coursework in early childhood

development/child care. Master Teachers who have advanced degrees in early childhood and infancy provide on-site supervision, mentoring, and training to the teaching teams.

How Educare provides services to pursue our long-term vision for low-income children is unique. Unlike most early childhood programs, Educare practices continuity of care to minimize transitions. Under our approach, children remain with the same peer group and caregivers for several years and experience only one transition while at Educare—at age three, from the infant and toddler classrooms to the preschool classrooms. The consistency in caregivers, small size of peer groups and minimized transitions help children to develop secure relationships necessary for healthy social emotional and cognitive development.

Educare uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining the skills of educators, family support specialists, researchers, consultants and community partners, to more effectively reach children and families. Family Support Specialists are supervised by a licensed clinical social worker and they help strengthen parent-child relationships and address some of the external challenges and concerns that

our families face. They meet regularly as a team with the education staff to develop and implement individualized family and program service plans.

Educare engages in ongoing assessment and tracking of child outcomes in the areas of social emotional development and early language and literacy skills. Ounce staff members use a variety of assessment tools, including Ounce Scale—developed by a team of researchers led by Dr. Samuel J. Meisels, President of the Erikson Institute—to assess, strengthen and improve relationships between parents and children. Our researchers relay this data to Educare teachers and staff continuously so they can adjust their instruction accordingly. This cycle repeats for each child for the five years they are enrolled, promoting greater readiness for kindergarten.

Through the Bounce Learning Network, the Ounce of Prevention Fund and all of our partners are working to continually improve the Educare program model. We incorporate the latest findings from academic research and lessons learned from our day-to-day experience with young children and their families into our ongoing program improvement process.

Educare Features

High Teacher-Child Ratios:

We keep ratios of teachers to children high to ensure quality individualized care and attention. There are three teachers for every eight children in the infant and toddler classrooms and three teachers for every seventeen children in the preschool classrooms.

Early Literacy and Language Development:

Research demonstrates that the early years are critical to children's later literacy development and that young children learn within the context of their relationships with primary caregivers. Educare provides staff development and training to help classroom teachers and parents promote early language acquisition and literacy.

Integrated Arts Program:

Neurological research shows sustained exposure to music and the visual arts can have a beneficial impact on brain development. We operate a privately funded Arts Program at Educare to enhance young children's development and because we believe the arts improve quality of life beyond specific developmental gains. On a weekly basis, our artists-in-residence—musicians, dancers, painters and storytellers—partner with teachers

to integrate arts into classroom instruction. Live performances of music and dance are also offered regularly on-site for children, families and staff.

Parental Involvement:

Educare parents are actively engaged in the Center. They complete a Family Partnership Agreement, which summarizes the goals and aspirations they have for their children and themselves. Parents also serve in important program governance roles. Educare parents and staff partner together to promote academic success and to address the overall needs of children and their families.

Prenatal Services:

We connect families with specially trained home visitors called *Doulas* who work with young mothers during the prenatal, intrapartum and postpartum periods, providing continuous emotional support and guidance to strengthen the parent-child relationship. They use a set of structured activities to facilitate healthy interaction between parents and babies. These activities—called the Community-Based Family Administered Neonatal Activities (C-B FANA)—allow parents to engage in the growth and development of their baby. The C-B FANA is based on the Neonatal Behavioral

Assessment Scale developed by Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, an internationally-recognized pediatrician.

Social Emotional Development:

To ensure that children develop the capacity to recognize and express emotions, empathize with others and form positive relationships, we conduct on-site assessments and observations to address children's social emotional development. Research has shown that children's social emotional growth is fundamental to their health, learning and motivation to achieve. Staff and parents partner to address this important area of development early to minimize the emergence or escalation of problems later in life.

Health Services:

On-site Early Intervention services are provided through our partnership with the local Early Intervention Child and Family Connections Program. Additionally, children and families receive primary care services and nutrition consultation at the Hayes Family Health Center, one block north of Educare.



A Promising Future

Policy Implications

Since opening the first Educare Center in Chicago in 2000, over a thousand visitors have toured the Center to get a closer look at its innovative approach to demanding and providing the highest quality education and care possible for low-income children and their families. But, Educare is more than an effort to extend quality services to a greater number of children and families; it is a catalyst for discussion and change state by state and nationally. The tours spark intriguing conversations: community leaders, funders, policymakers and colleagues from across the country dialogue about the inherent challenges in providing high quality early education and care and they look to the Educare model as a promising approach to successfully confront such challenges.

All of the Educare partners—both in Chicago and throughout the growing Bounce Learning Network—are working toward the same vision: making high quality early education and care available for low-income communities by combining critical funding streams and forming lasting partnerships. We are convinced that this approach will continue to serve as a model for the field, inspiring significant changes in the early childhood landscape and further expanding the opportunities for low-income children and families in the years ahead.





**Ounce of Prevention Fund
Chicago**
www.ounceofprevention.org

The Ounce of Prevention Fund invests in the healthy development of at-risk infants, toddlers and preschool children. We use an innovative cycle of family-focused programs, research, training, policy analysis and advocacy to help young children succeed in school and throughout life.



Ounce of Prevention Fund's original **Educare Center** on Chicago's south side has inspired a growing network of new centers in communities across the country. Called the **Bounce Learning Network**, these new Educare Centers are working to make sure that more at-risk infants, toddlers and preschoolers grow up safe healthy, eager to learn and ready for school.