

We are thankful for the opportunity to share with our child care providers, parents, business leaders, school personnel, policy makers, and community leaders the staggering numbers and facts associated with the needs of infants and toddlers in Ashe County and North Carolina. Our infants and toddlers need to see a change now! Our Think Babies™ event in January brought to light:

- the need for quality care and education to help teach children soft skills that are valuable to help them get along with others, learn respect, be good communicators, and become valued employees.
- that business leaders recognize there is an important connection between economics, early education, school readiness, and workforce success
- the world of work is changing and our strategies for developing tomorrow's workforce must change with it
- parents need access to affordable, quality child care which leads to better, more productive employees
- without access to quality care and education through our licensed child care centers and homes, many children may fall behind and there is a shortage of care available for infants and toddlers.
- there is a word gap that we need to address and it has to begin in the first three years of life.
- that there is value in making sure the early childhood educators who are caring for our youngest citizens are educated and compensated for the important work they are doing
- providing home visitation and other programs to strengthen family's protective factors are vital to reducing the number of adverse childhood experiences and promoting family well-being
- that starting early will lead to better outcomes in each child's life now and in their future.

Currently we have a shortage of available child care for infants and toddlers. If we were to lose a child care center, this could impact not only the children in care, but their working parents and those early childhood educators who are providing care. Parents would potentially have to quit their jobs because there would be no one to care for their children and early childhood educators would be unemployed. Investing in the care of our children and ensuring that parents have access to quality, affordable care is vital to our economy.

Families need support from programs like Family Foundations that are offered by Partnership of Ashe. Community investments in programs like Family Foundations that provide screenings for early detection of delays and help parents understand how vital their role is in their child's development, health, education and overall well-being, are strengthening family protective factors and building resiliency in our youngest citizens.

When we invest upfront in a child's early years with programs and policies that support early brain development and overall health and well-being, we will see positive results in their future and ours by lower remedial rates in elementary and college entry courses, increasing graduation rates; viable employment candidates, and better health as adults. This investment long term shows improvement in children and family's living in poverty, health and quality of life. We can then begin to see a new cycle of life that puts value in making sure infants and toddlers get the care and education that promotes development, closes the word gap, and ensures that a family has the connections and resources it needs. But the change has to start with us and it needs to start now.

In an effort to bring more attention to our infants and toddlers and their families

- the desire to make changes that will benefit Ashe County's economy,
- reduce the number of adverse childhood experiences,
- promote growth in our child care industry,
- eliminate the word gap,

- so that all children are school ready by age 5; and,
- ensure families have the support they need to strengthen their protective factors

We are requesting that the Board of Commissioners declare March Think Babies™ month.