

# united way bright beginnings

## 20 years of impact

Research shows that quality child care in the early years can be the single greatest difference between success and failure in our society. Early experiences shape whether a child's brain develops strong skills for future learning. Without a strong foundation on which to build, many children fall behind long before they start kindergarten—with little chance of catching up.

Compelled by overwhelming research indicating that investments in early childhood education yield tremendous returns through greater success in school and in life, United Way of Greater Houston and ExxonMobil founded United Way Bright Beginnings in 2002.

United Way Bright Beginnings is an innovative early education program designed to help children from lower-income families achieve social, emotional, physical, and cognitive milestones, and enter school ready to succeed.

Since 2002, United Way Bright Beginnings has prepared more than 15,000 children to reach their full potential. As United Way Bright Beginnings students have entered elementary school, they have excelled, outperforming their peers on achievement tests, demonstrating greater language abilities, and boasting higher attendance rates.



United Way  
Bright Beginnings



Greater Houston



# 20 years of impact

 **more than 15,000** children engaged in high-quality programs

**64%** of current home-based programs have been part of Bright Beginnings since Bright Beginnings began working with home-based programs **in 2014**



 **20,000 hours of free coaching** and professional development provided to child care programs and the families they serve

**48 high-quality center-based** and **26 home-based** child care programs



Alumni have consistently **higher STAAR achievement test scores**,

higher attendance rates, and lower disciplinary rates than their peers over the last eight years

**47%** of United Way Bright Beginnings centers have achieved **NAEYC accreditation**,



compared to **4%** of all licensed child care centers in Greater Houston.

**Another 37%** of Bright Beginnings centers are currently pursuing accreditation.

**268 providers** earned a Child Development Associate credential



50% of current center-based programs have been part of Bright Beginnings for **more than 10 years**

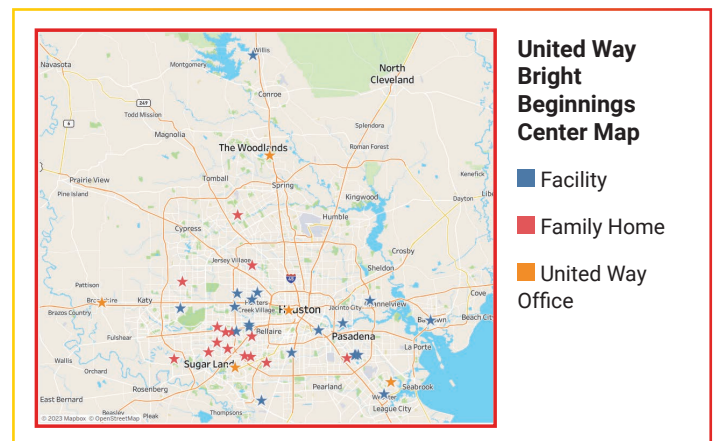
## how united way bright beginnings supports high-quality care

High-quality child care classrooms lead to better outcomes for children, starting with increased readiness for school. High-quality classrooms are led by trained and consistent staff who employ a developmentally

appropriate curriculum, maintain a safe environment, and provide warm interactions with children. These classrooms maintain a high teacher-to-children ratio and a high rate of parental involvement.

**United Way Bright Beginnings provides everything a child care center needs to be high quality, including:**

- ongoing professional development training for teachers, directors, family child care providers, coaches, and administrative staff that includes:
  - » CLASS\* training to support classroom quality
  - » children's brain development
  - » Reggio Emilia-inspired curriculum to support children's early learning
  - » mental health consultation for children, families, and providers
  - » provider health and wellness
- concierge coaching and consultation for every teacher
- leadership development for center directors
- quarterly wage supplementation
- family engagement strategies
- education reimbursement for early childhood classes
- all indoor and outdoor equipment
- access to fine arts programming



\* CLASS is a classroom quality observation tool that assesses effective teacher-child interactions across three broad domains including Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.



“Before I started the program, I was just taking care of children. I was just meeting their basic needs: food, attention, safety. Now, I don’t just take care of children, I teach children. [Bright Beginnings] has taught me how to adjust the classroom, arrange the classroom. They have given us a lot of professional training. And all of this is reflected in the care and teaching of each child.”

– Bright Beginnings Home-Based Provider

## the bright beginnings philosophy

United Way Bright Beginnings’ philosophy is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.

The Reggio Emilia Philosophy, named after the Italian city of the same name, believes that children are capable of constructing their own learning and the role of the teacher is to act as a researcher, documenting and supporting the self-directed experiential individual learning of each student.

Children learn as they play and teachers listen, follow, and ask questions to understand the individual learning of each child. United Way Bright Beginnings teachers create hands-on learning environments that support the interests of their students and document that learning to ensure regular reflection for the child, teacher, and parent.

## meeting children and families where they are

Over the last 20 years, United Way Bright Beginnings has supported 48 center-based and 26 home-based child care programs.

Bright Beginnings currently supports 34 licensed child care programs, including 19 center-based programs and 15 home-based providers.

While many families choose center-based care for their children, many others opt for home-based child care. Home-based child care providers operate licensed child care facilities out of their homes. United Way Bright Beginnings provides the professional development, training, coaching, and other support to help these home-based centers deliver the same high-quality care that is provided at United Way Bright Beginnings centers.

## quality care depends on quality professionals



Bright Beginnings teachers work hand-in-hand with a network of experts and receive support, training, and information to help them develop as professionals and provide the very best education and care to the children they serve. Teachers use a comprehensive, but varying, age-appropriate curriculum and targeted hands-on activities to address all aspects of children’s development, stretching their imaginations and developing skills for life. This collaboration allows them to develop and refine lessons and activities that stimulate learning and provide an autonomous educational environment.

United Way Bright Beginnings has invested in increasing the education level of directors and teachers through educational scholarships and an in-house Child Development Associate certification (CDA) program. Among our Bright Beginnings teachers, 268 have earned a CDA, 31 have earned an associate degree in early childhood, 16 have earned a bachelor’s degree in early childhood, and 13 have earned a master’s degree in early childhood. Increasing the education level of providers has contributed to high quality environments and teacher-child interactions, and has empowered providers to view themselves as professionals in the early care field.

## the connection between coaching and quality

Excellent centers start with excellent teachers and directors who are trained and equipped to nurture children at this important stage in their development. United Way Bright Beginnings provides center staff with in-depth training and one-on-one coaching to support them as they grow as professionals, and to help them build confidence, implement best practices, and work through challenges.

United Way Bright Beginnings' coaches have been one of the keys to the program's success and their support for teachers and directors has helped strengthen professionals' commitment to the field. Retention among Bright Beginnings directors tops 75% and among teachers reaches 83%, compared to an average 30% annual staff turnover in early childhood education.

"I'm grateful for United Way Bright Beginnings because I worked in other centers before and it's a total change. I just love it. I love what they stand for. I love how they support us. I love how we have consultants that come out and support us. That's the biggest thing - we're constantly learning, and the teachers are learning, and the children are learning. It's just a great environment to walk into. Being a part of this program has enhanced our quality of care for kids."

– Bright Beginnings Center Director

## achieving accreditation

A goal of United Way Bright Beginnings is to have each center accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This accreditation is the gold standard in terms of high-quality care and is very difficult to obtain.

47% of United Way Bright Beginnings centers have achieved NAEYC accreditation, compared to 4% of all licensed child care centers in Greater Houston. Another 37% of Bright Beginnings centers are currently pursuing accreditation.

## evaluation and data guide this work

Brazelton Touchpoints Center (BTC) based in the Division of Developmental Medicine at Boston's Children's Hospital, a Harvard Medical School teaching hospital, is the third-party evaluator for United Way Bright Beginnings. BTC studies and provides longitudinal evaluation and data to help guide Bright Beginnings' work, including social and emotional development data, standardized test data, and data related to attendance, grade retention, and disciplinary indicators.

## the future is bright

No matter how you look at it—from an individual, community or economic perspective, early childhood education is critical to developing strong families, safe communities, and a thriving economy. What we do now is laying the groundwork for our children to become the scientists, engineers, civic leaders, and teachers of tomorrow.

In its first 20 years, United Way Bright Beginnings has established a path to academic success for 15,000 children, creating a better future for them and their families, and improving the quality of child care in Greater Houston.

As we look to the future, Bright Beginnings is focused on expanding both center and home-based care to provide more families with quality child care, increasing NAEYC accreditation among providers, establishing partnerships with school districts that allow us to track and analyze more alumni data, and continuing the important work of helping children learn, grow, and achieve their dreams.

It is with extraordinary gratitude that we thank ExxonMobil for its partnership and investment in United Way Bright Beginnings over the last 20 years.

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