

Southeast Children's Fund

Executive Summary

Organization Background

Southeast Children's Fund (SCF) is a nationally recognized and accredited 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that has served young children (ages 6 weeks to 5 years), their families and the professionals who work with them, for over **27** years. Founded in **1994** by Ms. Frances J. Rollins, the organization is committed to providing quality programs rooted in current research and effective practices in early childhood education. The organization provides educational programs designed to assist residents in Wards 7 and 8 to transform the neighborhood to a place where people thrive, not just survive. To fulfill its mission, the organization plans, coordinates, and implements high-quality and effective programs and services designed to benefit those it serves through its child development centers and Professional Development Institute. SCF's Early Childhood Education Centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and licensed by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), offering quality childcare and professional development opportunities including Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to those who participate in their Professional Development Institute. SCF believes that communities need high-quality educational environments and instruction, and to be given adequate opportunities to be exposed to a wide-array of groundbreaking and fresh moments, ideas and experiences. SCF stands by its motto: *we develop differently*.

Three decades before SCF came into existence, the vision began to take shape through the creation of the first center in the neighborhood. In 1968, in the midst of the riots and despair following Dr. King's assassination, the Sunshine Early Learning Center opened, emitting a new light of hope for families in Southeast DC. Since its inception, the Sunshine Early Learning Center has provided a safe space that serves educational needs while inspiring hope and perseverance for children and families in a community riddled in adversity. For over 50 years the Sunshine Early Learning Center has served as a model of educational excellence that boasts hefty evidence based results. Its graduates include the current Councilmember for the ward. When Southeast Children's Fund was founded 30 years later, the Sunshine Early Learning Center became the flagship center of the organization's vision to offer quality education, family support, professional caregiver training, and inspirational transformation in Southeast DC.

Today, over 10,000 children and their families have benefited from the dedicated efforts of the Sunshine Early Learning Center and Southeast Children's Fund. Their early learning center is both a safe haven and educational center that ensures young children, their families and professionals in underserved neighborhoods have the foundation they need to become productive citizens. Through multi-layered care and training, SCF has worked to open doors to opportunities through education and family support in under-resourced areas of Southeast DC. Holding high standards for quality services, their early childhood center is nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of the most respected associations for high-quality early learning. SCF works closely with

education experts like Teaching Strategies whose partnerships enrich their curriculum and day to day services. Over the past 3 decades, SCF's Professional Development Institute has trained over 3,000 childcare practitioners for the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential. As one of many providers throughout the city, SCF achieved the Gold Standard from the Council for Professional Recognition for the CDA Course offered, despite the limited resources of the Institute and its students. As SCF continues to grow in its services and reach, the vision of its founder remains at the core of SCF: to provide a nurturing safe haven in the midst of a neighborhood plagued with poverty and related crime, and to be a space of hope, perseverance, and exceptional excellence.

Responding to Community Needs

Since its beginnings, Southeast Children's Fund has worked to reach the most vulnerable populations of Washington, DC. They strategically grounded their work in Ward 8 to respond to the complex challenges that many families in this ward face; over 85 percent of the children who they serve are considered "at-risk." According to DC Action's DC Kids Count¹, the following statistics describe the community in Ward 8: 47% of black children under 5 are living below the poverty level and 13,347 children (over 50% of the ward's population under 18) are enrolled in SNAP, which amounts to 35% of the total enrollment in DC of children in the program. Without adequate prenatal care, 44% of DC's infant deaths were to families in Ward 8. OSEE also reports that preterm births are highest in Ward 8². Additionally, Ward 8 has reported the highest number of substantiated cases of abuse and neglect of children in the District of Columbia for over 10 years.

Students attending schools in Ward 8 have lower scores, higher dropout rates, and less resources than their peers in other areas. Parents often work long hours or multiple jobs to make ends meet, limiting their time at home with their children for learning and social-emotional support. Transportation in this part of the city presents another challenge for families. Care-givers must work around public transportation schedules for school drop off and pick up, when scheduling healthcare appointments, and when considering extra curricular activities or opportunities for their children. The current transportation system in Southeast DC is a serious limitation to families' access to healthcare, employment, and enrichment opportunities. With the forthcoming closure of the United Medical Center, the gap for accessible healthcare will grow even greater for the community.

Children who grow up in this area face barriers that put them at a great disadvantage to their peers in other areas of the city and country. The only way to break down these barriers and work towards new opportunities is through a holistic approach that unites education, healthcare, job training, and mentorship to empower young people and their families to find new paths forward.

Current Programs

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- 1- The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org
 - 2- DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Preschool Development Grant, Birth through Five Needs Assessment, 2019, osse.dc.gov

In response to the complex needs facing the Ward 8 community, Southeast Children's Fund has developed a strong set of programs that supports families through holistic care and empowerment. SCF's current programs include the following:

- Early Learning Center: Quality education, care, and support for children ages 6 weeks through 5 years and their families
- Professional Training Institute: Child Development Associate (CDA) Program, an OSSE-certified training program for adults seeking a career in early childhood education and care
- Strengthening Families Programs: Mutual support for parents and families
- Effective Black Parent Program: Exploring the challenges and solutions of parenting
- Community Engagement and Support: Annual Family Fun Day, Annual Coat Drive, Fresh Farmers Produce Drive, Colgate Dental Van, etc.
- Food Equity Programs: Support families weekly with bags of fresh fruits and vegetables
- Before and After School/Summer Enrichment Programs: Helps students (ages six to twelve) to further their education during the school year and summer by creating an interactive curriculum that includes virtual and in-person field trips, lessons that enforce what they have learned in the most recent school year, and an early jumpstart on studies they will learn next year
- Literacy Learning Project: Promoting literacy and the arts in 'low-income neighborhoods' by partnering with local schools and community organizations to build outdoor library boxes and filling them with books
- Virtual Learning Center:

Southeast Children's Fund has made great strides through their multifaceted programs offered through their current childcare center. Their impact on the lives of children and families serves as a model for early childhood learning, despite the challenges of their current center. During the Covid-19 crisis, the center previously operating out of the Salvation Army closed. Their main center, the Sunshine Early Learning Center, is currently located in an old bowling alley, with limited windows, poor indoor air quality and other physical deficiencies that are proven to negatively impact children's learning and emotional and mental health. In the face of such adversity, the staff and leadership still excels in providing a nurturing environment that overcomes the building physical, technological and other deficiencies.

Looking Forward

Committed to its mission, Southeast Children's Fund continues to seek new opportunities that lead to greater impact for families in the Washington Highlands neighborhood and Southeast DC. Currently SCF is working to expand into three key areas that respond to the needs of their community: the development of a new facility, the expansion of professional development opportunities, and the addition of elementary students to their early learning center programs.

After serving the community for over 50 years, SCF is proposing a new center that can offer physical space to enable the growth of their high quality support services to families and invite partners to provide additional on-site services. Serving as a community hub, the new state of the art center will provide the following services in Washington, DC's most underserved ward:

- Affordable housing
- A modern educational center for young children

- Quality workforce training facilities
- A neighborhood healthcare center
- A food hub to serve and partner with the greater community

Through this comprehensive model, SCF will have a space conducive to fully living out its mission and serving the community at full capacity. Given the resounding success that the program has had it's not hard to fathom the increased outcomes that can be achieved from being housed in a state of the art, high performing facility.

Recently, SCF received the opportunity to provide additional support for educators seeking professional training in early childhood education. In June 2018, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) increased the minimum education requirements for child development facility staff members, requiring that teachers hold an associate degree in early childhood education (ECE) by December 2023. In 2021, SCF was awarded the DC Leading Educators toward Advanced Degrees (DC LEAD) grant from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) Division of Early Learning (DEL) to lead and oversee the support of the District's early childhood education (ECE) workforce in meeting the current education requirements by providing a scholarship opportunity that will cover the cost of tuition and books for program scholars as they pursue an associate or bachelor's degree in ECE. Through DC LEAD, SCF will also offer incentives to child care educators who are enrolled in an associate or bachelor's degree program or meet the minimum education requirements. DC LEAD aims to provide comprehensive support to the current workforce by promoting professional development, staff retention, and career advancement. The DC LEAD program will provide the current workforce with the knowledge, skills and credentials to work with DC's youngest learners and increase the number of high-quality early childhood professionals in the District.

For years SCF has offered quality care and support to young children up to age five. However, the need for the support offered by SCF programs and staff continues well beyond the early years. As a way to accompany children and their families into later stages of development, SCF is working to expand their programs to include children through fifth grade. Families make many decisions during the elementary years that influence access to opportunities and aspirations for the future of their children. If SCF can continue working with families through these crucial years, the support they offer families will help influence a new generation that believes in their future and can find resources to grow into the leaders their community needs. Through a longer relationship with SCF, families will benefit from the support needed to persevere despite the challenges they face. They will be beacons of hope in a community in search of a brighter future. And their children will become leaders who work to transform their neighborhood into a place where future generations can dream freely.

The future of SCF and the families of the Washington Highlands neighborhood is full of potential. In order to move forward with these new initiatives, SCF seeks partners who can join its mission. It is imperative that these programs have facilities that reflect the type of environment that its children, families, community residents, and staff deserve. SCF's goal is to continue to bring projects that expose the community to STEAM, affordable housing opportunities, quality healthcare, job training, healthy eating, and more. With adequate space and services, SCF will continue to be a leading organization,

recognized for the quality of its programs and services responsive to the needs of the children and families in Washington, DC, specifically children and families in Ward 8.