

Scholarship shortage threatening early care

Story by **Durham's Partnership for Children, Board of Directors, Executive Committee**
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Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative, has been working for more than 15 years to support and expand high-quality early care and education programming for all children birth to age 5 because we know that this is what works and this is what every child deserves.

We are proud of the system we have built through Gov. Jim Hunt's vision of Smart Start. Our agency's focus is to improve access and availability of high-quality child care for all families, with a particular focus on low income families.

In fact, more than half of our Smart Start funds go directly to scholarships for families who are low-wage workers. The Smart Start Scholarship program administered by Child Care Services Association supports child care tuition for Durham's children birth to 5 whose parents need child care to work, look for work or attend school or to address a child's developmental need.

Unfortunately, all funds allocated to the general scholarship component of the program have been spent and we cannot continue serving all of the families currently enrolled. It is painful to know that the lives of families will be greatly disrupted when their scholarships end this month. These families will face great challenges in continuing to support their families. In addition, many child care facilities, which are small-business owners and their staff, will be impacted during an already strained economic climate.

We believe that we must come together as a community to plan for the future. These families in need join a child care assistance wait list of more than 1,500 children.

We must voice the stories of those whose lives are severely impacted by the lack of funding, of our children whose quality early education is disrupted and of our small child care businesses who struggle every day to survive this recession. This is a community problem, a challenge we all face as we prepare the next generation to grow up to become our future taxpayers.

The community need for child care scholarships and other programs cannot just be met by Smart Start funding. Our agency has seen its Smart Start funding decline over the past 10 years by 32 percent in Durham while the number of Durham's young children birth to age 5 has grown by 35 percent — a trend that is expected to continue.

As an agency, we are exploring options to shift available resources to help meet this immediate need, however, our 2010-11 resources are all under contract. We will continue to work with our partners to identify new resources and strategies to expand access to high-quality child care for families in Durham. We will continue our strategic discussions with the Business and Faith Communities and will continue to explore private and corporate foundations and local government for emergency and longer-term funding.

We are asking the community to help us to ensure that every child in Durham is given the chance to succeed.

Please follow this link to the Partnership Web site and donate through Network for Good:

http://partners.guidestar.org/controller/searchResults.gs?action_donateReport=1&partner=networkforgood&ein=56-1892432.

Businesses or individuals can also contact the Partnership's acting executive director at (919) 403-6960 to make arrangements to set up a scholarship fund to support young children's future through high-quality early education.