



**SEIU**  
**EDUCATION &**  
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# Rhode Island ELCC Spotlight Report



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## I. Introduction

**Guided by our shared values of equity and inclusion, ESF Rhode Island has designed a program that provides peer-led professional development that grows and retains the family child care workforce. The Educator-Led Communities of Care (ELCC) program is a rigorous nine-month training series focused on the fundamentals of running a family child care business. ELCC are peer-led learning communities that reduce the isolation family child care educators experience, while providing training and wraparound support for providers to develop their businesses and grow as leaders. It is an opportunity for community and leadership building among child care providers in the state.**

**The vital difference in this professional development program is the peer-led structure. Peer-led learning communities reduce the isolation that family child care educators (FCCEs) experience, while providing training and wraparound support for providers to develop their businesses and grow as leaders. FCCEs responded with great enthusiasm to the rollout of ELCC, and we received over 30 applications for this first year of the program from educators in the 02908 and 02909 zip codes.**

Through focus groups, surveys, and testimonials, we've found what family child care providers most value about this program is the worker-centered, peer-led approach. Participants said the program gave them the support and tools they needed to establish and grow their businesses, leading to them feeling like they have what they need to stay in the workforce for the long term.



## II. Methodology

To gain insights on the impact of the program on Rhode Island's first cohort of participants, we worked with a professional evaluator to plan and conduct surveys and focus groups. This external evaluator was hired to assess impact and program satisfaction through the development of surveys and the facilitation of focus group discussions. Two focus groups were conducted in Spanish online - one with four cohort participants, facilitated by ESF staff, and one with all four cohort peer leaders, facilitated by the evaluator. Participants were self-selected volunteers. The discussions were video-recorded and supplemented with note taking. The collected qualitative data from focus groups, surveys, and testimonials were analyzed using thematic analyses to identify recurring patterns and themes.

## III. Findings

The focus groups, surveys, and testimonials yielded rich insights from participants and peer leaders. By capturing the voices and experiences of the participants in this first cohort, we are already seeing the impact the program is having on educators. The two core emerging ELCC impacts:

- **The worker-centered, peer-led difference for professional development.**
- **How the program contributes to sustainability for providers and their businesses.**

# IMPACT & PROGRAM SATISFACTION IN RHODE ISLAND



## 1. Worker-centered, peer-led difference

The first year of the Educator-Led Communities of Care program in Rhode Island was fully led by peer leaders, educators with experience in the child care field who play an essential role in the ELCC network by serving as facilitators, community builders, and leaders within their assigned cohort. During this pilot year, the four peer leaders created a supportive environment for educators to connect with each other and sustain and grow their businesses. They listened to their cohort's needs and interests and carefully developed a focus for each session based on what they learned.

Peer leadership meant that the leaders "really knew the work," according to Rosangela Ramos, ELCC Program Manager. This created an environment rich in sharing and learning, where participants said they felt "respected," "comfortable and relaxed," and able to be vulnerable. As one participant explained, "We feel free to express ourselves and receive the experience of each provider and our [peer leaders]. Our [peer leaders] are an excellent team." Participants gave special praise to the group culture the peer leaders created and the topics covered.

## Educator-Led Communities of Care

Delivering a tangible impact for participants and peer leaders alike.



*"For me, we were valued. We were listened to, our opinions were valued." - Participant*



*"They involved us in everything." - Participant*



*"They took into account our needs and gave us the support we need." - Participant*



*"I love the meetings. I get rid of my doubts and I can offer my knowledge." - Participant*



*"The topic[s were] very important and productive." - Participant*



The experience of being part of a peer-led professional development program not only impacted the participants, but the peer leaders as well. Peer leaders said they felt supported and like respected professionals in their role, and Rosangela saw this translating into peer leaders "taking ownership over their groups," and "taking the lead each month on creating each session." Peer leaders "learned together" with participants on each topic, creating shared knowledge from their individual experiences and filling gaps when necessary. "Together [they] learned to find strategies and solutions." One peer leader explained, "It's a collecting of ideas." In addition to new knowledge, peer leaders also gained a level of emotional fulfillment:



*"ELCC was a significant help personally and professionally. I had the opportunity to share my experiences and what I have learned with other providers. Hearing from them and their experiences and to be able to help them problem-solve the challenges they face through the sharing of our stories. To support them. To hear their voices and for them to hear my voice. That had such a big impact on me."*

*- Peer Leader*



*"I have had the opportunity to, first of all, do what I enjoy: being able to help my colleagues resolve problems. It's small, but we can't always count on having someone that can give you correct answers. Anyone can opine, but not everyone will give you a correct answer. Being able to share resources with the rest of the group makes me feel full and satisfied."*

*- Peer Leader*



*"The truth is, for me, from the moment that I was invited, I felt honored to have been taken into consideration. It is beautiful to stand in front of my colleagues because that place allows me to look into the face of my colleagues and see myself as I am: fellowship. I have felt respected, valued, with the responsibility of filling that role that has been given to me to be able to share. For me, it was a dream come true. I always wanted to be a teacher. The collection of ideas has been of great satisfaction and learning. Rosangela, Dulari, Stephane, and Jax have done a great job in making this a reality. It brings me joy to know that we, the four of us, are part of the solution."*

*- Peer Leader*

**Overall ELCC participants and peer leaders felt a significant difference as a result of it being a worker-centered, peer-led program.**

## 2. Sustainability

Many participants said that ELCC has made them more engaged and empowered, giving them what they need to stay in the field long term. One participant said she now felt “more connected to her work,” while another shared, “It is a radical change. I was about to give up, but ELCC helped me organize myself and learn about rights that I didn’t know.” Someone else emphatically shared, “I want to continue! This truck has more!” I have more courage to continue. I want to continue working with what I learned and develop more professionally.” ELCC contributed to the sustainability of educators and their businesses through two main areas of impact:

- 1) Individual and relational development
- 2) Increased awareness of and access to resources.



- ✓ More Courage
- ✓ More Development
- ✓ More Connection
- ✓ More Support

### *Individual and relational development*

Educators, both cohort participants and peer leaders, reported multiple ways participation in ELCC had changed them for the better, growing their skills and knowledge and developing and maintaining strong peer connection and support.

### *Cohort participants*

Among cohort participants, the most common change noted was being more organized. These educators became more organized in how they maintained and managed their business, kept paperwork for DHS, and developed and managed contracts with parents and other documents. Participants also grew their knowledge about their business, their rights, and other areas, such as how to develop “activities suitable for children.” They developed social-emotional skills, “learning to have more patience with children” and “keep their minds calm to come to a solution” when “solving problems with parents,” becoming “more confident [and] motivated to put what [they’ve] learned into practice, [such as] how to resolve conflicts,” and wanting “to get more involved in meetings that help [them] be a better leader.” They strengthened connections with their peers, learning to rely on each other for support. Quotes from participants express the profound changes they experienced as part of ELCC:

# GROWING SKILLS & CHANGING FOR THE BETTER

“Above all, to create and be a part of a community of support amongst providers .. changed my ways of working to better strengthen my weaknesses, while implementing better skills.”  
- Participant

“ELCC helped me to dedicate myself to my professional development, and to feel more motivated to participate and to utilize the ample variety of resources around my own professional development to better my work. This includes participating in collective experiences of learning as well as to be able to rely on the support and the mentorship of other people in the same field.”  
- Participant

“I felt good because I met more colleagues. I felt good in the class and learned a lot that I didn't know.”  
- Participant

“The ELCC group was a huge help for me. I would even go as far as to say it was a big blessing that has opened many doors and knowledge for me as an educator. I've only been in the field for two years and this group has helped me to strengthen my sense of security and confidence, and to always be prepared in various areas, in which I had doubts about myself as an educator before.”  
- Participant

“ELCC has been a big support to better my day-to-day program. ELCC is a guide which has helped me understand and to put to practice new ideas that I have learned from my colleagues. Some of them are around problem-solving with a professional approach, how to take advantage of sick time hours and how to keep up-to-date with program paperwork in case of a visit from the state and to be more organized. I believe more trainings like these help me and motivate me to give the best version of me as a child care educator in my community. Thank you.”  
- Participant





# A FOCUS ON COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Rosangela also shared a few stories that illustrate the changes she saw among ELCC participants, particularly in new and strengthened connections with each other and with ESF. One educator, before ELCC, was “at the point of throwing in the towel over parents not understanding her boundaries. She felt like this cohort was what she needed, saying ‘This is my group.’ Rosangela explained that the “energy and power they felt in the space was refilling their cup. They had a community they didn’t have before coming to ELCC.” She shared how another educator came to her with challenges renewing her license in Rhode Island. Rosangela saw the fact that she reached out for help as growth: “Before that, she didn’t have a relationship with the Training Fund. I take it as such an honor when someone’s newer to our space, and they reach out to us when they’re having a problem. This means all of ESF is their community. They can reach out to me, to ESF more for help.” Rosangela saw many educators “taking risks and showing vulnerability,” as they connected with each other. “Quiet or shy people opened up more” as the program went on.



## Peer leaders

Peer leaders felt they had changed in how they relate to others, improving their communication and empathy skills and applying these skills to their work in the groups.



*"[I've learned to] express myself in a way that providers understand and can be clear about the training we facilitate."  
- Peer Leader*



*"[I've increased my ability] to have empathy, to respect different points of view."  
- Peer Leader*



*"For me, it's really been about becoming aware of the needs I have to then be able to share with my peers. Not all of us have the ability to express that we have a need but I do like to get that out of others."  
- Peer Leader*



*"It has changed me because I have made a commitment to be more observant in my program and those observations I share with my colleagues. Now I observe more in my day-to-day."  
- Peer Leader*

Rosangela noted that the peer leaders particularly gained communication skills through developing their ability to use PowerPoint. They requested that ESF arrange a training that she described as "amazing." She said, "They're still talking about it and using it to create slides [for their sessions]. They felt empowered, valued. They didn't have to call me anymore for everything. They started this [second year of ELCC] more confident."

This confidence extended beyond PowerPoint skills. Peer leaders learned how to be vulnerable and ask for help, where to go to ask for help and find resources, gained new problem-solving tools "which became a guide for how they moved forward and overcame challenges as they came," and shifted how they saw

## Spotlight on:

# Rhode Island

## Family Child Care Provider Peer Leaders



themselves as professionals. They also became "more confident giving each other feedback" and leading their sessions independently.





*"I really liked learning the skill of solving problems in 6 steps. Having a formula to do it has helped me a lot. I analyze the problem, try to find a solution and, if it doesn't work, I try to find another solution. Even though I was a facilitator, I was utilizing this skill and it has helped me a lot."  
- Peer Leader*




*"In the moment that a provider understands what their role is and educates themselves, the perspective changes from babysitter to professional."  
- Peer Leader*

Peer leaders also grew by working with each other, across differences. Rosangela explained, in the beginning, there were “so many conflicts that [she] had to mediate between them.” By the end of the year, “they all work[ed] a lot better together.” “No one had to make a huge change,” she said, “but they adjusted to each other’s leadership styles” and “named their needs,” if they really needed to be paired with a different facilitator - “now they speak their truth.” By the end of the year, they were also having “real and raw” conversations, both with each other, and with cohort participants.

 *“One gains more skills because colleagues have different opinions. The most important thing is learning from new perspectives. It brings us joy that it was a very productive year.” - Peer Leader*

 *“It has taught us how to work in a group. It taught us to work in union.”  
- Peer Leader*

 *“Learning from different languages and cultures - we all have different personalities and characters - and sometimes it’s difficult to navigate so many differences, but it was a good year. It has helped me work on my compatibility when working with others. It is important to accept when you make a mistake. There will never be a perfect pairing, but the point is to get to a place of compatibility and move this project forward.”  
- Peer Leader*

### **More awareness of and access to resources for FCCEs**

ELCC increased FCCEs’ awareness of and access to a variety of resources, by making sure participants knew about benefits available to them through the state and/or the Union and by developing a number of important initiatives in collaboration with educators in response to their expressed needs. These initiatives,

some of which are still under development or adjustment, include DHS-visit binders, a shared marketing platform, a pool for substitute educators, and financial management and tax preparation services.

### **DHS-visit binders**

After participants shared their struggles to manage Department of Human Service (DHS) visits, while simultaneously running their programs, peer leaders developed a workshop to help every ELCC participant build a binder to organize their materials for when DHS visits their site. These binders eased participants’ anxieties related to the visits. Rosangela reported participants were “so excited about it.” She explained, “Participants came back and said, ‘I sat the social worker at the table, I gave her a binder, then I went back to running my program.’” Peer leaders then facilitated the same workshop at WEPA, bringing it to a broader group of FCCEs. DHS and its social workers have provided positive feedback about the binder system.

**“A dream come true”**

**98%**

**Said they wanted a shared marketing platform for their businesses**

### **Marketing platform**

When ESF surveyed ELCC cohort participants early in the program, they voted this shared service highest - 98% said they wanted a shared marketing platform for their businesses. ESF included everyone in its development so that the platform would work for FCCEs. Rosangela shared that the ELCC participants felt a sense of ownership over the platform, feeling like it was theirs after being “such a big part of the design process.” Participants felt like this resource “is formalizing [their] field.” They shared that they

“fought for this” through their long contract negotiations with the state, and that “it is a dream come true.” After the platform’s launch, it will host profiles for FCCEs and serve as a formal, professional resource to better connect them to parents and guardians looking for programs that will be the right fit for their children.



### *Sub pool*

ESF developed a pool of substitutes that FCCEs can draw from as needed. However despite initial excitement and desire for this resource, it remains underutilized, according to Rosangela. ESF plans to learn more about why people are not using the sub pool, who they are using instead,

and explore if there is a better way to support FCCEs to take sick time. Rosangela shared that this might involve a culture shift - “there is a lot of powering through in this community.

## New Programming for FCCEs



- Quarterly Trainings
- 1:1 Coaching Sessions
- Monthly Group Meetings
- Business Finance + Tax Prep

### *Financial management and tax prep services*

ESF is still developing this last resource for FCCEs, with the help of three tax prep/financial management providers working alongside a part-time TA for business management. While the survey revealed that financial management and tax prep was another top need among FCCEs, ESF has been exploring what it looks like for this community. The plan will be to offer quarterly trainings and monthly small group and 1:1 coaching sessions that will cover personal and business finance topics and how to fill out taxes as a FCCE.



## IV. Implications of Findings

Before conducting the focus groups and surveys, it was already clear that there was a demand for this program. We received over 30 applications and were able to accept all applicants with strong participation from 15-17 of them in the first cohort. And the program is resonating with this cohort. Participants would highly recommend ELCC to other FCCEs. Said one participant, others should join ELCC, "So that you also learn what I learned and FEEL what I felt when being with my colleagues. I recommend it 100%." Another shared, "I would recommend it because it is something that helped me. It can help others in their business, so that they can do it more professionally. This is made for us providers and what we do day to day." A third said, "It gives you answers to many questions that we have and to recognize what we are doing wrong."

Many participants ended the program asking, "What's next?" for themselves and wanting to continue learning. One entreated, "If [in the next cohort] you are going to give a different topic than what you already did, take us into account! I would like to return. We are the pioneers. We cannot be left behind!"

In addition, all peer leaders from the pilot year "decided to continue their journey" and lead another group in the next cohort. One of these peer leaders shared how important she felt the work of ELCC was to individual educators, as well as the entire field:



*"I think that the more united we are as FCCPs, the more we educate ourselves in the field of FCC, the more we will demonstrate and educate to the community and to parents that we are not babysitters, that we are professionals. The topics that we have presented make us more professional. We want all providers to have a contract. It is important that our profession is respected. The more providers we recruit, the more professional the group becomes." - Peer Leader*

Indeed the positive reception of the program indicates there is more to do and more ways the program can grow, by bringing in more participants, as well as in other ways. For example, multiple participants wished there was more meeting time as part of the program, either through longer or more frequent class sessions. One participant said this would mean being able "to have more time to be able to share without rushing." Peer leaders want to continue building their skills with support from ESF, particularly to develop and practice their technology skills to use in class and to communicate with each other, as well as to address more sensitive or controversial topics among educators.

## V. Conclusion

It's clear that this first cohort has been a success with FCCEs and they want to see it continue and grow. The program's worker-centered, peer-led approach; ability to develop and connect educators; and offering of needed shared resources are highly valued by educators. And the tools and support that ELCC offers are helping providers establish the foundation they need to create sustainable businesses that keep them in the field. With continued investment, this program can expand to meet the demand and help grow and retain the early child care and learning workforce in Rhode Island for years to come.

