

# INVESTING IN THRIVING CHILDREN

When a child has stability, resources, and connections, they will flourish. The earliest experiences and relationships have lifelong effects on the development of a child. Early childhood education lays the groundwork for lifelong success and is vital in nurturing a child's full potential.

Our Secure Start Initiative offers a network of community partners that provide early childhood educators and caregivers with guidance and education. This eight-week course helps caregivers support a child by building strong emotional and social foundations.

Together, we are building a foundation for children to learn, grow, and truly thrive. Educators, caregivers, and parents are learning to adapt the way they interact with children to deepen connection and trust with children, while learning more about themselves in the process.

In 2025, we expanded the reach of the Secure Start Initiative to include New Haven School Readiness educators and providers, bringing this vital support to classrooms across the community and impacting even more children.



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**This program opens minds to understanding behaviors a child is communicating but they don't know how. If you have the education to understand, then you're helping the child with their emotional development.**

Kimberly L., Early Childhood Education Administrator

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**This was eye opening and helps me to be an emotionally mature and intuitive person with a lot more empathy.**

Secure Start Parent



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# STRENGTHENING FOOD SECURITY IN GREATER NEW HAVEN

The increased price of food has put a strain on families who were already struggling to get by. Today, so many of our neighbors are working hard to overcome barriers to build a life where they can thrive.

42% of households in Greater New Haven don't make enough money to afford basic necessities like food, rent, and child care.

United Way works with community organizations around Greater New Haven to create a united system of food assistance to improve access to healthy, culturally appropriate food for all.

We strive to make healthy food more readily available for our neighbors who need it. Each year, United Way donors and volunteers come together to feed tens of thousands of children and adults through food distributions, pop-up pantries, summer meals for kids, serving prepared meals, and more.

**Together, we're building a community where everyone has access to nourishing food.**



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It's been very hard to get by on our food budget. Everything is so expensive now. This food pantry is a big help for my family.

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Grocery prices increasing has led to making different choices, including what produce and meat products to purchase.

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The best thing about this pantry are the food options. Although eating healthy is best, many of us can't afford to do so and end up eating more affordable options that that aren't nutritional.



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# DAIVEYANAH'S STORY

Daiveyanah, a mother of two and a guardian to her younger brother, is a graduate of United Way's Parent Leadership Training Institute.

She credits the program with opening her eyes to new possibilities for herself, her children, and her community.

"The opportunity to see powerful, beautiful people of color in my community, actually making a difference," Daiveyanah shares, "Whether they were community coordinators, case managers, alders, newspaper reporters, judges, or mentors sitting right in our classroom.

**"Every class, I saw someone who looked like me, doing real work, creating real change. They were within arm's reach and they believed in us."**

One of the biggest benefits of the Parent Leadership Training Institute program was connecting Daiveyanah to a village of other parents and community leaders, giving her the network of support to go after her dreams.

She is now applying to become a member of Hamden Town Hall's Community Development Citizens Advisory Commission, and is also developing an after-school mentorship and workshop program for teens.

"My goal is to build a team that listens to youth. That values their voices. That gives them real tools, real hope, and real community."

Daiveyanah shared how becoming a parent leader has shifted her perspective:

**"This program gave me something I didn't expect - a completely new vision for my life. It inspired me to take community leadership seriously and helped me become a better version of myself. It brought me one step closer to the dream I've had since I was young: to help others."**



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# ERIC'S STORY

As a single father, Eric knows how important it is to find the right early childhood program to set his children up for success. That's why he enrolled his daughter, Leilani, in Early Head Start at the West Haven Child Development Center, a program designed for babies and toddlers ages 0–3.

It was her first experience in a structured learning environment. “It was the first time she ever went to a program like that,” Eric shared. “She really enjoyed it.”

Eric visited several options before deciding, but Early Head Start stood out. **“They had an actual curriculum, which was more like a school and structured like a school,”** he explained. **“I wanted to set her up for the real world.”**

The impact has been clear. Leilani has become more social, learned her numbers up to 20, and can name all her colors.

Just as importantly, she's gaining confidence and feels comfortable being around other children – a big step for a child who was previously home with her sister.

For Eric, the benefits go beyond academics. **“Early Head Start is more than child care – it connects you to your community,”** he said.

Through Early Head Start and other programs, Eric has found family events, resources, and opportunities to keep his daughters active and engaged.

**“I wish more people took advantage of it,”** Eric reflected. **“It's here for families, with really supportive people. Even if you don't think you need the services, you may need the connections and social activity it offers.”**



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