



## **MEDIA CONTACT**

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Community Action to Grow Early Childhood Programming, Expand Workforce in Lincoln**

*Lincoln, NE* – Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird and Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties announced today that Community Action has received a \$1,660,500 annual grant from the Office of Head Start to expand its Early Head Start programming in Lincoln. Funding will allow Community Action to build its early childhood enrollment capacity from 421 to 493, adding 72 full-day, full-year center-based enrollment slots for infants and toddlers. The expansion will fill a significant need for high-quality early childhood services – particularly for this age group – in Lincoln.

“Access to high-quality early childhood education forms a critical step on a child’s pathway to successful adulthood,” said Mayor Gaylor Baird. “Ensuring this access for all children, regardless of their family’s level of income, is our community’s shared priority. I congratulate Community Action on their well-deserved award of this grant and thank them for utilizing their experience to fill a clear need in our city.”

Community Action has been providing Head Start services in Lincoln since 1966. In 2016, recognizing the community’s need for full-day, full-year early childhood services, the agency opened two early childhood centers in Lincoln and later added a third. The funding announced today will enable the agency to open yet another center, housing nine classrooms, at 26<sup>th</sup> and N Streets, around which child poverty rates are among the highest in the city.

Community Action estimates that there are approximately 2,000 infants and toddlers in Lincoln who would income-qualify for Early Head Start services. Eligibility is generally based on family income being at or below the poverty level (\$26,500 per year for a family of four). Children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, and children from families receiving public assistance such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are eligible regardless of income.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to not only provide kindergarten-readiness services to more children, but to give more parents a cost-free childcare option as they work and participate in programs to build economic stability, such as by attending professional development classes,” said Vi See, Executive Director of Community Action. “Lincoln has a high rate of workforce

participation among those living in poverty, and not enough quality, affordable child care options. This program expansion will help to fill this gap.”

Opening the new early childhood education center is possible in part thanks to the partnership of Speedway Properties. Speedway Properties’ investment in this expansion will involve remodeling their property at 2615 O Street into a learning environment built especially for young children.

“Speedway Properties has a strong relationship with Community Action, and we truly believe the programs and services they offer bridge the gap between living in poverty and achieving successful outcomes,” said Clay Smith, General Partner of Speedway Properties. “Investing in this project is a victory for Lincoln that will have a long-lasting positive impact on our community and its children for many years to come.” The agency expects the center to be fully operational by the fall of 2021. Once open, it will provide seven hours of services Monday through Friday at no cost to families.

In addition to expanding access to high-quality early childhood education, the grant will create 30 new jobs in Lincoln. Community Action, named a Best Place to Work in Lincoln for four consecutive years, is actively recruiting Lead Teachers, Associate Teachers, Teacher Aides, and other support positions. The agency offers a generous paid vacation and benefit package; paid professional development; an opportunity for educators to earn credentials on the job; and other attractive benefits.

“We’re looking for compassionate, skilled infant/toddler educators who are excited about fostering early learning,” said See. “Joining our team is a great opportunity for early childhood professionals to hone their skills, build credentials to advance their careers, and make a life-long difference in the lives of children and their families.”

The agency is also asking the community for support to make its program expansion possible. See says the agency needs to raise just over \$61,000 from the community to support the purchase of furniture and supplies needed to ready nine classrooms before the fall. Things like cribs, cubbies, tables and chairs, and educational materials will all be needed before children are welcomed into the new space.

“We’re fortunate to be in such a giving community, and one that understands the importance of ensuring access to early childhood education,” said See. “We certainly invite all individuals, groups, businesses, and other entities to partner with us to give children in our community the opportunity to succeed.”

Serving over 17,000 individuals in Lancaster and Saunders Counties last year, Community Action empowers people living in poverty to reach economic stability. Its programs and services address the causes and conditions of poverty in four impact areas: Early Childhood Education, Homelessness Prevention, Financial and Family Well-Being, and Hunger Relief and Healthy Food Access. To learn more, including how to apply for employment or to participate in the agency’s early childhood programs, or provide financial support visit [www.communityactionatwork.org](http://www.communityactionatwork.org).

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