

# The heroic beginnings of child care

## Looking back two centuries

by Roger Neugebauer and Debra Hartzell

The field of early care and education has a long, proud history. In conducting research on the oldest child care centers in the United States, we discovered 75 organizations (see complete list on pages 36 and 38) that have been in operation more than 90 years; the oldest of which, Newark Day Care Center, has been in operation for 207 years!

Rather than summarizing the many stories of these historic programs, we will let them tell their own amazing stories.

### Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers

*Atlanta, Georgia*

Our organization was founded in 1888 and chartered in 1900 by a group of women from the First United Methodist Church in downtown Atlanta. While delivering mended clothes to the needy, they found a child tied to a bedpost for 'safekeeping' while her mother worked long hours in a cotton mill. Determined to help, they began caring for the first children in 1888 in an abandoned railroad boxcar. They soon were able to talk cotton mill owners into providing space for them to care for the children on site in the cotton mills. This was no doubt among the first 'corporate sponsored' child care.

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### Graham-Windham Services

*New York, New York*

In 1806, Mrs. Isabella Graham, Mrs. Alexander Hamilton, and 12 other women established the Orphan Asylum Society. Other early contributors to this organization included Governor DeWitt Clinton, Peter Stuyvesant, and Jenny Lind. These men and women were concerned with the plight of orphaned children who were often forced to work for food and shelter under harsh and exploitative circumstances. As New York City grew, these concerns broadened to include the children of "poor but worthy parents" who needed to "go to their daily labors" knowing their children "would be trained for some practical, useful course of life and taught their duties and responsibilities as members of society." As a result, in 1835, the Society for the Relief of Half Orphan and Destitute Children was opened to meet the child care needs of working parents.

### Fannie Battle Day Home for Children

*Nashville, Tennessee*

Fannie Battle was driving in her horse-drawn buggy along a street in North Nashville when she spied a



Kings Daughters Day School, Plainfield, New Jersey

crowd gathered on the side of the street. Never one of those who passed by as if it were nothing to her, she stopped her horse, got out of the buggy, and walked into her future. She found the object of interest to be a small, undernourished boy lying on the ground crying from pain. When Fannie Battle asked what had happened, she was told that he had "got run over by an ice wagon." When no one could identify the child, his parents, or his residence, she picked up the four year old in her arms, put him in the buggy, and drove him to a hospital where his injuries were treated.

The more Fannie Battle investigated the North Nashville area, the more she discovered neglected, small children who had no daytime care while their mothers worked outside their homes. She immediately laid plans to rent a room in a conveniently located house near the cotton mills where a few mothers could leave their children for day care; Fannie Battle financed the rental from her own limited means. It was soon found that one room

was inadequate to meet the need — it quickly grew to ten children. She wanted more for the children than mere baby tend-



ing while mothers worked. Soon a room was rented for a gymnasium, because Fannie Battle believed in good health of body, mind, and soul.

**South Side Day Nursery**

*St. Louis, Missouri*

From the 1888 Second Annual Report of South Side Day Nursery: “Every dollar spent at the Nursery means from one to three dollars earned by the mother while her little one is in our care. But that is not all. Every mother receives her child at night happy, clean, and in excellent physical condition. . . . Another and somewhat unexpected good result has been secured . . . women wanting work have been brought in contact with those who want workers. Our nursery is fast becoming a bureau for the supply of work to working mothers. . . . People of various denominations are working together for tender babies and toiling mothers, two classes of people whom it has always been hard to help, without wasting money and encouraging habits of idleness and shameless dependency.”

**Leila Day Nurseries**

*New Haven, Connecticut*

New Haven in 1879 seemed to be bursting at the seams. Every day, newcomers from Europe streamed into the city, bringing the population from 20,000 in 1850 to 100,000 in 1900. Many immigrants found jobs in New Haven’s homes, shops, and factories, especially in garment factories. Founded as the Mothers’ Aid Society of New Haven in 1878, the school was renamed Leila Day Nursery in 1885 in memory of Leila Ingersoll Gauss, a board member’s relative who died at ten years of age. Mission Statement: to help the poor hardworking women of New Haven, by relieving them of the care of their children during the day and to improve those children physically and morally, so that as they grow up they may become intelligent, honest, and well-to-do members of the community, instead of inmates of the poorhouse or penitentiary. From the

beginning, the Mothers’ Aid Society sought to lessen the effects of poverty on families. In 1883, the Society opened a laundry at the nursery to provide jobs for unemployed mothers. Soon after, the ‘Intelligence Office’ was established to locate jobs for mothers in homes around New Haven.

**Holy Family Day Home**

*San Francisco, California*

In the 1870s, San Francisco was an amazing community of multi-ethnic families and neighborhoods — the same diversity of which San Francisco is so justly proud today. At the same time, it was a city of both millionaires and of desperately poor families. Moved by the often-troubled lives of her neighbors, Lizzie Armer (known as Sister Dolores) founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1872. The Order began to care for the needs of broken families, the lonely, the elderly, the sick, the poor, and the hungry.

Mostly, though, they turned their attention to the difficult lives facing so many children in the booming city. In many families both parents had to work to make ends meet, so children were often left unattended, roaming the streets and alleys in dangerous neighborhoods. By 1878, the Sisters opened their first Day Home to “provide a place where the needs of the child could be attended to while peace of mind and material assistance” could be offered to the beleaguered parents. The Sisters began to expand their program and investigated the concept of Kindergarten. In addition to maintaining and supporting the families of the poor, they could also prepare the children to successfully enter the school system.

The Early Childhood Education Community owes so much to Friedrich Froebel. He truly pioneered early childhood education as we know it today. The Sisters were certified Froebel Kindergarten teachers and by 1906 pioneered this concept of Kindergarten on the Pacific Coast.



**Community Day Nursery**

*East Orange, New Jersey*

On a cold day in March, a volunteer social worker visited a home to find three young children alone. There was no heat, so the house was cold. The oldest boy was nine years old and was preparing a meal for the younger two with only a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread. Their mother had no one to care for them while she was at work. The year was 1892.

Clearly, there was a need for women in the area to have care for their children, so in 1894 a committee was formed to address the problem. A day nursery was opened in a house at 11 New Street in Orange and a matron was hired to supervise the children. Volunteers made soup at home to bring to the nursery each day. The tuition was five cents a day for one child, eight cents for two, and ten cents a day for three children.

**Toledo Day Nursery**

*Toledo, Ohio*

The Toledo Day Nursery’s roots are in the Adams Street Mission. This Mission was started in a saloon in order to find employment for men and women, to care for young children, and to take older children off the streets. . . . The children were bathed first thing in the morning and fed twice a day. Many of the children’s parents lined up before 7 AM to take any available jobs, paying five cents a day to the nursery if they could.

**Day Nursery Association**

*Scranton, Pennsylvania*

The Day Nursery was founded in 1909 by

**The Exchange Top 75**  
**North America's Oldest Child Care Organizations**

Organization	Location	Executive Director	Date Established
Newark Day Center	Newark, New Jersey	Trish Morris-Yamba	1803
Graham-Windham Services	New York, New York	Poul Jensen	1806
North End Children's Center	Boston, Massachusetts	James Luisi	1826
Leak and Watts Services	Yonkers, New York	Alan Mucatel	1831
St. Ann's Infant and Maternity Home	Hyattsville, Maryland	Sister Mary Bader	1860
Toledo Day Nursery	Toledo, Ohio	Pat Scheuer	1871
Associated Early Care and Education	Boston, Massachusetts	Wayne Ysaguirre	1878
Holy Family Day Home	San Francisco, California	Donna Cahill	1878
Leila Day Nurseries	New Haven, Connecticut	Gladys Deutsch	1878
CBA Hurst Preschool	San Francisco, California	Irene Byrne	1879
Virginia Day Nursery	New York, New York	Aurora Ceniza	1879
Center for Families and Children	Cleveland, Ohio	Lisa Goss	1882
Edward Street Child Services	Worcester, Massachusetts	Diane Bruce	1883
Square One	Springfield, Massachusetts	Joan Kagan	1883
Lowell Day Nursery Association	Lowell, Massachusetts	Jo-Anne Spence	1885
Cheerful Home Childcare & Early Learning Center	Quincy, Illinois	Jeris Grim	1886
Columbus Early Learning Centers	Columbus, Ohio	Kim A. Fulton	1886
SSDN (South Side Day Nursery)	St. Louis, Missouri	Anne Kessen Lowell	1886
Memorial Day Nursery of Paterson	Paterson, New Jersey	Gina M. Johnson	1887
Bethany Lenox Hill Day Care Center	New York, New York	Warren Scherf	1887
Creche Child Care Center	Omaha, Nebraska	Lisa Richardson	1887
Lincoln Day Nursery	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Thelma Miller	1889
Camden Day Nursery	Camden, New Jersey	Alyssa Wilds	1890
St. Michael's Day Nursery	Wilmington, Delaware	Helen C. Riley	1890
Haverhill Day Nursery Association	Bradford, Massachusetts	Kathy DeFel	1890
Pro Re Bona Day Nursery	Chattanooga, Tennessee	Ikeko Bass	1890
Brooklyn Kindergarten Society	Brooklyn, New York	James Matison	1891
Fannie Battle Day Home for Children	Nashville, Tennessee	Sara Longhini	1891
Pawtucket Day Child Development Center	Pawtucket, Rhode Island	Evenly St. George	1892
Children's Day Nursery and Family Center	Passaic, New Jersey	Susan Dannemiller	1892
Salvation Army Day Care Center	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	Richard Allen	1893
Winifred Wheeler Head Start Daycare	Bronx, New York	John Sanchez	1893
Community Day Nursery	East Orange, New Jersey	Kathy Burke	1894
Neighborhood House	Salt Lake City, Utah	Jacob Brace	1894
Brockton Day Nursery	Brockton, Massachusetts	Patti Plummer-Wilson	1894
Hudson Guild	New York, New York	Ken Jockers	1895
New Rochelle Day Nursery	New Rochelle, New York	Sabrina Delgado	1895
KCAA Pre-Schools of Hawaii	Honolulu, Hawaii	Christina Cox	1895
Waterbury Day Nursery Association	Waterbury, Connecticut	Emily Konopacke	1895
Kingsley House	New Orleans, Louisiana	Keith Liederman, Ph.D	1896
Early Connections Learning Centers	Colorado Springs, Colorado	Diane Price	1897
Marillac House	Chicago, Illinois	Bart Winters	1897
Salvation Army Child Care	Chicago, Illinois		1897
The Kings Daughter's Day School	Plainfield, New Jersey	Valeria Erdosi-Mehaffey	1898
Day Nursery Association	Indianapolis, Indiana	Carolyn M. Dederer	1899
Sayre Child Center	Bethlehem, Pennsylvania	Tina I. Siegfried	1899
Sheltering Arms Early Education and Family Centers	Atlanta, Georgia	Elaine P. Draeger	1900
ChildCareGroup	Dallas, Texas	Margaret Patterson	1901
Jenkintown Day Nursery	Jenkintown, Pennsylvania	Kim Jones	1903
Colony-South Brooklyn Houses	Brooklyn, New York	Balaguru Cacarla	1904
Gate City Day Nursery Association	Atlanta, Georgia	Doris Dickens	1905
Snell's Kindergarten School	Stockton, California	Donna Johnson	1906
Fruit and Flower Child Care Center	Portland, Oregon	Rhonda McDowall	1906
Christopher House	Chicago, Illinois	Lori Bass	1906
Mile High Child Care	Denver, Colorado	AnnaJo Haynes	1906

*continued*





Snells Kindergarten School, Stockton, California

a group of compassionate women who “shared a deep consciousness of the personal tragedy of children in need of care while their mothers worked.” The original Day Nursery was situated in two rooms in the basement of one of the original founding members, Mrs. A. W. Dickson. The original stated mission of the Day Nursery was “to make daycare available to children of employed mothers according to the highest standards of physical, mental, and spiritual welfare.”

### Neighborhood House

*Salt Lake City, Utah*

Our story begins over one hundred years ago, 1894 to be exact, when Utah was still a territory. The children of the less fortunate needed food, clothing, care, and guidance. Emma K. McVicker, a former teacher in the Presbyterian schools, dreamed of alleviating these social issues when she conceived the idea of opening a public kindergarten. Mrs. McVicker and a dedicated board of trustees made this dream a reality. The goals of the organization, then known as the Free Kindergarten Association, were “to provide instruction for underprivileged children commensurate with instruction given in more favored districts; to become better acquainted with parents in poorly regulated homes; to raise the standard of living; and to provide, when necessary, food and clothing.”

During the first years, new services were added, such as: a milk station that dispensed free milk, set up at the request of the State of Utah; a public playground open to the children and youth of the neighborhood; bathrooms

open to the public for free baths; Americanization classes offered to the increasing number of immigrants in the community; and an employment bureau

for women seeking work. There were general neighborhood gatherings held in the evening offering lectures, music, and literary entertainment.

### St. Ann’s Infant and Maternity Home

*Hyattsville, Maryland*

In 1860, three Daughters of Charity, a religious order of women dedicated to helping the poor, came from Emmitsburg, Maryland, to the nation’s capital where they established the city’s first foundling home. They had answered a call from Reverend Charles White, pastor of St. Matthew’s Church and a member of a group of clergymen and physicians who had become aware of one of the city’s major problems — abandoned babies and young children. A critical marker in St. Ann’s history occurred on March 3, 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln signed an Act of Congress to incorporate St. Ann’s Infant Asylum, as it was then called. As stated in that document, St. Ann’s was chartered “for the purpose of establishing and maintaining in the city of Washington, in the District of Columbia, an institution for the maintenance and support of foundlings and infant orphan and half orphan children, and also to provide for deserving, indigent, and unprotected females during their confinement and childbirth.”

St. Ann’s Infant Asylum was charged with caring for the city’s growing number of abandoned children and orphans, as well as unwed mothers of all races and religions, many of whom had no place else to turn. The Sisters not only provided the children with a home, food, and clothing, but nurtured

them with love and gave them their earliest lessons. It was at St. Ann’s that they learned not only to crawl, walk, and talk, but to recite the alphabet and their prayers, to read and write, as well as to do their chores.

### Columbus Early Learning Centers

*Columbus, Ohio*

As a response to the growing number of women coming from the farms around Columbus to Columbus for work in factories, a group of women recognized the need for care for the young children of these working mothers and created the Oak Street Day Nursery in 1886. There were four children in the first group of little ones. That number quickly grew as word spread about quality of care and education the children received. The center was staffed with a full-time matron, cook, and housekeeper. Children received good, healthy food, a safe place to play, rest, and learn. In addition, the Nursery provided physical examinations and generally took care of the all of the children’s needs.

### Early Connections Learning Centers

*Colorado Springs, Colorado*

In the late 1800s, Colorado Springs had become a retreat for ailing tuberculosis patients. Two physicians noticed that tuberculosis improved rapidly in the high altitude Pikes Peak air if patients were fed well and given rest and exercise. Many of the visiting invalids were poor, since the rich patients took their large incomes to more luxurious health resorts. With the influx of people chasing the tuberculosis cure, there were many families with working mothers and no one to care for their children. The problems of these children were different from those children in large industrial cities. Many of these children came from homes in which there was tuberculosis and they were undernourished. A group of 14 women concerned about the changing needs of children in Colorado Springs held an organizational meeting for the Colorado Springs Day Nursery

**The Exchange Top 75** (continued)  
**North America's Oldest Child Care Organizations**

Organization	Location	Executive Director	Date Established
New London Day Nursery	New London, Connecticut	Melanie Smith Cervera	1906
Poughkeepsie Day Nursery	Poughkeepsie, New York	Virginia Lena-Murphy	1907
St. Elizabeth's Day Home	San Jose, California	Dianna Ballesteros	1907
Neighborhood Centers	Houston, Texas	Angela Blanchard	1907
Mary Crane Center	Chicago, Illinois	Lavetter Terry	1908
North Avenue Day Nursery	Chicago, Illinois	Steven Koll	1908
Milestones Early Learning Center	Bloomington, Illinois	Dana David	1908
Parkersburg Day Nursery	Dallas, Texas	Karen Pccio	1908
EOAC Early Head Start Program	Waco, Texas	Johnette Hicks	1908
Day Nursery Association	Scranton, Pennsylvania	Grace Hogan	1909
Places and Programs for Children	Portsmouth, Virginia	Toni Cacace-Beshears	1911
St. Vincent's Day Home	Oakland, California	Corinne M Mohrman, M.A.	1911
Long Beach Day Nursery	Long Beach, California	Patricia Wong	1912
Evanston Day Nursery	Evanston, Illinois	Serena Romero	1912
Middletown Day Nursery	Middletown, New York	Tekki Rescenski	1912
Julia Day Nursery and Kindergarten	Aconia, Connecticut	Sharon Kelly	1913
Lancaster Day Care Center	Lancaster, Pennsylvania	Nancy Jordan	1915
Holyoke Day Nursery	Holyoke, Massachusetts	Ann Sherlock	1916
Boulder Day Nursery	Boulder, Colorado	Steve Callander	1917
Orlando Day Nursery Association	Orlando, Florida	Mata Dennis	1921

Based solely on information supplied by the organizations.



in 1867. The object of this meeting was “to assist working women in the care and education of their children and to procure employment for such women.” The purpose was to maintain a home “wholly non-sectarian, for children whose families were unable to care for

them; to prevent a permanent separation of families; to promote child welfare in the community.” These women wanted a place for small children of working mothers to have competent and sympathetic supervision.

Photographs were supplied by the organizations from their historical archives



North End Children's Center, Boston, Massachusetts