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Legacy in Action: National Center for Families Learning awards three winners in Sharon Darling Innovation Fund Family Learning System Challenge

Winning programs take different approaches to two-generation family learning

LOUISVILLE, Ky., (July 18, 2023) – STEM lessons from a telenovela. An alumni network that builds on preschool family learning achievements once children reach kindergarten. A playbook for teaching parents how to play with their children. These three distinct programs topped more than 360 applicants for the Sharon Darling Innovation Fund Family Learning System Challenge, from [National Center for Families Learning](#). The winning organizations – Literacy Partners of New York, Bright Beginnings in Washington, D.C., and Oregon State University – will each receive \$30,000 to implement their project.

Established in honor of NCFL's founder, the Sharon Darling Innovation Fund was created to develop and test new family learning breakthroughs across the country. Research shows that parent engagement in education is critical for a child's long-term success in school and beyond. In addition to student gains, the whole family benefits, contributing to a thriving, equitable community.

"I couldn't be more excited to see the massive response to this challenge, and so many cutting-edge ideas," Darling said. "The three winners are so different in their approach to family learning. These grants will help each organization take their project to the next level and will have a transformative impact in the lives of families and communities across the nation."

The Sharon Darling Innovation Fund Family Learning System Challenge seeks to support ground-breaking programming that increases access and quality of educational opportunities for parenting adults and families; improves learning outcomes for children and caregivers; enhances and increases positive interactions between children and caregivers, develops parent leadership skills, and promotes strong connections and engagement between families, schools, and communities.

Each grant builds on already strong programming that fits within NCFL's two-generation family learning approach:

Literacy Partners: The New York-based organization will deepen learning related to its science-themed telenovela-style mini-series, created in partnership with Univision. This grant will be used to create a workshop curriculum with families in Philadelphia and Dallas. The curriculum will bring-to-life STEM-related lessons from "La Fuerza de Familias Latinas." The hands-on activities will encourage caregivers and children to develop science literacy, as well as

build cognitive foundations of STEM learning, including wonder and curiosity, observation, measurement, experimentation, and persistence. “La Fuerza de Familias Latinas” STEM telenovela and curriculum premiere this fall.

Bright Beginnings: Bright Beginnings serves families experiencing housing instability and financial hardship in Washington, D.C. The organization provides high quality pre-kindergarten, Head Start and Early Head Start, and family wraparound services. Bright Beginnings will utilize this grant to create an Alumni Support Network for families whose children have transitioned to kindergarten and continue support through the children’s high school graduation. Its vision is to partner with local public and charter schools and other organizations to create a collaborative community that empowers parents to grow a strong social fabric, with access to supports and resources, so their families may thrive.

Oregon State University: Professors Xiangyou Shen, Ph.D. (College of Forestry) and Shauna Tominey, Ph.D. (College of Health) are teaming up through their work with the Hallie E. Ford Center for Healthy Children & Families at Oregon State University to develop a program that encourages and empowers parents and caregivers to take a more playful approach to parenting. Through play, children learn foundational academic skills, grow social-emotional strategies, and physically strengthen their bodies. Play also positively impacts parents, including improving parent-child relationships, parenting behavior, enjoyment and well-being, as well as child outcomes. Parents and caregivers with preschool-aged children will help develop and evaluate the curriculum. Then, the “Playful Path to Parenting” would be deployed statewide through parent educator training supported by the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative.

“These diverse programs will engage with parents and caregivers and their children in unique and exciting ways, and, long-term, bring the potential opportunity to scale efforts on a national level through NCFL’s partners,” said Dr. Felicia C. Smith, NCFL president and CEO. “One organization cannot drive change alone. We must work together, consider innovative ideas for improving family learning systems, and nurture and spread the ideas that work. By doing so, we unleash opportunities for children and families to thrive.”

The three projects will begin work immediately and continue over the next 12 to 18 months.

About National Center for Families Learning

National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is a national nonprofit that supports family success and well-being through education. NCFL believes education is a shared responsibility and collaboration among families, schools, and community members that leads to powerful learning experiences. Partnering with educators, literacy advocates, and communities, NCFL has worked for over 30 years to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. NCFL's vision is to establish coordinated and aligned family learning systems in 60 communities by 2030, built with and for families, to increase education and economic outcomes and create more equitable communities. When parenting adults and children are engaged in learning together, the whole family benefits, contributing to a thriving, equitable community. For more information on NCFL, visit familieslearning.org.

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