



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sharon Darling to retire as President of the National Center for Families Learning

LOUISVILLE, KY (August 9, 2021) – More than three decades after founding the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL), Sharon Darling will retire from her role as President at the end of this year.

Starting in a small Kentucky church basement in the 1970's helping adults learn to read, Darling went on to become the nation's pioneer of family literacy, which brings parenting adults and their children together to learn. NCFL was founded in 1989, and since then has piloted, evaluated, and scaled the model, ultimately successfully aligning an approved federal definition of family literacy with the philosophy of family literacy created by NCFL. To date, more than 4.5 million parents and children across 150 communities in 39 states and Washington, D.C. have improved their lives through education offered through NCFL.

The organization's digital properties, including Wonderopolis® and the National Literacy Directory, have grown to foster learning connections among tens of millions more learners, while its annual Families Learning Conference has become a leading literacy and family engagement event nationwide.

Darling's time teaching reading in a church basement was followed by three years spent researching adult literacy. With her findings hailed by the U.S. Department of Education, she traveled the country consulting with governors and policymakers as they addressed their challenges of adult literacy. Darling returned to the Ky. Department of Education to tackle the multigenerational challenges of illiteracy and launched a groundbreaking multigenerational learning initiative in Appalachia - the Parent and Child Education (PACE) program. Again, her work was deemed a success, winning awards from the Ford Foundation and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. It led to a grant from the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust to create NCFL.

NCFL is headquartered in Louisville, Ky. with statewide offices in Arizona and Nebraska and partnerships with local cities and communities throughout the nation. A 30-year partnership with the Bureau of Indian Education has extended the organization's footprint to dozens of American Indian communities, and its policy work continues to reverberate across the country with a federally-recognized annual National Family Literacy Day®, Family Service Learning Week, and ever-growing family engagement support. Today, NCFL's family literacy work has evolved to meet the changing and dynamic needs of society while maintaining its core, multigenerational

philosophy so that every family member can succeed. The organization's advancements include the launch of a national early childhood network, parent leadership in education initiatives in six communities nationwide, and leveraging virtual reality to support family learning.

Along the journey, Darling met with four U.S. presidents and worked with many administrations to share the power of family literacy. She was instrumental in helping Barbara Bush create the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, serving as a founding board member and close friend to Barbara for many years. Her many honors include the National Humanities Medal, Woman of Distinction Award, and Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism along with three honorary doctorates and the American Prize for Literacy from the Library of Congress.

Darling had the ability to create long lasting partnerships with corporations and foundations that positively impacted families experiencing poverty. For example, Toyota Motor Corporation has contributed over \$50 million to NCFL. In the words of Honorary Chairman of Toyota Motor Corporation Dr. Shoichiro Toyoda from the book *Grit, Grace and Gratitude*, "When I first met Sharon 30 years ago, I was deeply impressed with her great vision that parents and children learn together, her passion and strong leadership, and her tireless efforts to break the cycle of poverty and low literacy. Sharon's vision soon became our own."

She took great pride in working with so many determined parents and children. "It has been my greatest honor to work alongside so many hardworking, inspiring families for all these years," Darling said. "Never did I expect my life to unfold how it has, but each day I am grateful to all those who believe in the tremendous power of multigenerational learning. I am incredibly proud of the work of NCFL, and I know the next generation of leaders will engage families in education like never before."

Moving forward, Darling will continue to serve as an active member of the NCFL Board of Directors and will support the organization in a variety of ways. The Board has announced the creation of the [Sharon Darling Innovation Fund](#), which will enable NCFL to test new family literacy and learning innovations throughout its national network. To kick off this fund, the organization has raised \$750,000 through board leadership. For any individuals or institutions interested in donating to build upon the strong legacy established by Darling, please contact scoughlin@familieslearning.org. NCFL will announce its new president in the coming weeks.

About the National Center for Families Learning

The National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) is a national nonprofit that works to eradicate poverty through education solutions for families. Partnering with educators, literacy advocates, and policymakers, NCFL develops and provides programming, professional development, and resources for families. Through these efforts, we invite parents and caregivers to recognize their voice and power to make change in their lives, the lives of children, and their communities. For more information on NCFL, visit familieslearning.org.

Media Contact

Shea Coughlin
Senior Vice President
National Center for Families Learning (NCFL)
502-655-0770
scoughlin@familieslearning.org

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