

Liftoff Celebrates Week of the Young Child



Over the past few months, Liftoff has been busy shining a light on some of the biggest issues facing young children in our region. In April, we focused specifically on universal developmental screenings and Early Intervention - critical supports for a child's healthy growth and development.

Across the country early childhood organizations and initiatives celebrated the [Week of the Young Child in early April](#). This week was created to draw public attention to the needs of young children and highlight the important early childhood programs and services that support them. Liftoff proudly joined with our [Live Well Erie partners](#) at the Audubon Branch of the Amherst Public Library to proclaim April 5–11 as the Week of the Young Child in Erie County. The event was led by Erie County Executive, Mark Polonzar, Deputy County Executive, Lisa

Chimera as well as Chelsey Lonberger (Youth Outreach Service Manager, Buffalo & Erie County Public Library), Kim Suminski (Executive Director, Child Care Resource Network) and Liftoff's Megan Battista. Please find Megan's remarks [here](#).

Liftoff also celebrated a major headline this month with a front-page, feature story in The Buffalo News about the importance of Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education. The article, written by Ben Tsujimoto, discussed how decades of underinvestment have stretched the Early Intervention workforce thin, leaving infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities waiting for services and critical, life-changing therapies. Liftoff is committed to making this a visible, urgent issue. “We don’t want this to be a hidden issue anymore,” said Rachel Bonsignore, Liftoff WNY’s Director. “We believe we have a collective responsibility to do something.” New York currently ranks last among all 50 states in providing timely services for young children—a statistic we must change. Please find the article [here](#).

Aligned Action Report



Building Momentum for Early Childhood in Budget Season

Liftoff WNY’s advocacy has been laser-focused on elevating early childhood priorities during New York State’s budget negotiations. This has included

meeting with legislators including Assemblyman Bill Conrad, Senator April Baskin, Senator Sean Ryan, and Majority Leader People-Stokes. Director Rachel Bonsignore, also pitched the priorities from the Kids Can't Wait Campaign at a speed briefing organized by the WNY Women's Foundation, inviting the staffers and policymakers in the room to consider where THEY were in 1994, and sharing that EI providers have received a stagnant rate since that year. (Rachel pictured above).

In this session, over 400 messages were sent to legislators across the state advocating for the Kids Can't Wait Campaign priorities, with over 160 messages going directly to WNY representatives from Liftoff partners and friends.

Be sure to follow LinkedIn for Liftoff updates around the final enacted budget and to stay up to date on our priorities for this legislative session.

LinkedIn

Onboard: Ambassador Recognition



Onboard continues to grow and thrive in new opportunities. This month, we celebrate Gerald Smith, early childhood expert and [PEDALS](#) Assistant Director of Operations for being willing to try something new: submitting an Opinion piece to the Buffalo News.

Gerald states:

“The early years are the most active period for establishing the brain’s neural connections, with more than 1 million new connections formed every second in the first few years of life. Additionally, 90% of brain development happens before kindergarten. Every minute of every day is crucial, **the early years matter most so we can’t keep wasting time.**”

Read Gerald’s full Op-Ed [here](#).

Are you interested in becoming an Onboard ambassador and making sure we continue to center the needs of young children in Western New York? Whether it’s being featured in a news article or sharing on social media- every ambassador makes a difference on behalf of kids.

Learn More: Onboard



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