

For Immediate Release

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NEW CHILD CARE SECTOR STRATEGIST AIMS TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL CHILD CARE SYSTEM

EUGENE, ORE. – The lack of accessible, affordable child care in Lane County has long plagued families and employers, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Starting this month, the newly created position of Child Care Strategist will tackle this complex issue head-on.

The new position, part of the larger Sector Strategy Team at [Onward Eugene](#), was formed after conversations between United Way of Lane County, Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce, Lane Workforce Partnership, Lane Community College, and others, exploring how to create quality, affordable child care across the county. United Way secured funding to make this role possible.

This month, local early learning advocate Holly Mar-Conte was hired to take on this work. Mar-Conte brings over 15 years of experience working in local early learning systems and building community partnerships.

The results of this new position have the potential to create lasting positive impacts for local communities for years to come.

“High-quality early childhood care is the foundation for many long-term outcomes for kids,” said Noreen J. Dunnells, United Way of Lane County’s President and CEO. “This includes increased health and wellness, higher graduation rates, fewer incarcerations, money saved in the k-12 system, and most importantly, children better prepared to be thriving, contributing members of our community. United Way knows how urgently we need to address this complex challenge, and are thrilled to help fund a position to tackle it.”



Addressing gaps in the child care system benefits more than just children.

“This is not only a crisis for families seeking high-quality, affordable child care; it impacts local employers struggling to attract and retain talent,” said Matt Sayre, Managing Director of Onward Eugene. “Now with Holly Mar-Conte in this dedicated role at Onward Eugene, we are excited to join with regional partners in advancing solutions to this challenge.”

Studies show this crisis has a disproportionate impact on income-constrained families and women. In Lane County, during the second year of the pandemic, 6,700 local women left the workforce. Balancing work and family simply got a lot harder for all parents without child care, and the financial scales tipped.

This is a triple loss, as the workforce becomes less diverse, smaller, and children miss early childhood education opportunities. Even within the child care sector itself, providers have struggled to keep doors open, recruit and retain diverse staff, and more. Addressing such a complex issue will require a strategic, cross-sector approach.

Having just started in the role last week, Mar-Conte will first convene a group of those most closely impacted by the issue – child care providers and families with young children – to surface added clarity on the most pressing challenges and develop relevant strategies that can be rapidly implemented.

In keeping with the sector strategy model, Mar-Conte will then broker partnerships between local businesses, community-based organizations, education, philanthropists, and government to expand equitable access to high quality, affordable early care and education.

“Our community is fortunate to have many of the pieces and relationships in place to address this complex issue,” said Mar-Conte. “We know there are no simple answers, but I’m looking forward to co-creating innovative solutions to meet the diverse needs of Lane County’s families, child care providers, and broader workforce.”

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United Way of Lane County works to ensure all children are successful in school and life. To do this, United Way brings together the passionate individuals and organizations that have the knowledge and resources to get things done, engaging top leadership from every sector to develop strategies that will change systems, and invests in programs and services that address our community's current social crises. To learn more, visit www.unitedwaylane.org.

Onward Eugene unites regional partners — mobilizing rebuilding efforts to fully realize our region's shared potential for expansive and inclusive prosperity. Bringing together support for startup companies, business expansion, regional marketing and business recruiting initiatives. Onward Eugene is a force multiplier in the creation of economic resilience. Onward Eugene is 501(c)3 nonprofit. For more information about Onward Eugene, please visit www.onwardeugene.org. Connect with us on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

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