

Communities United, Inc.

Annual Report for Program Year

9/1/2024 to 8/31/25

In providing services to children and their families, Communities United Inc. does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Communities United, Inc.
Annual Report
Program Year September 1, 2024, to August 31, 2025

Communities United Inc. (CUI) is a community based private nonprofit organization which operates high quality, early childhood education programs and provides comprehensive services to children and their families. CUI's **Creative Start Children's Centers** operate half-day and full day childcare programs for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers

Communities United, Inc. actively serves families living in the communities of Arlington, Belmont, Brookline, Burlington, Lexington, Needham, Newton, Waltham, Watertown, Wellesley and Woburn. While CUI serves children from the full socio-economic spectrum, our focus is on identifying the most at-risk families and ensuring that their needs are met. Within our catchment area reside many families experiencing homelessness, these children and families are our primary focus and are served by our center based programs.

Funding to support CUI's ongoing mission comes primarily from Federal and State sources. CUI was founded in 1970 as a Head Start grantee agency with funding from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services which now accounts for over half of CUI's annual revenue. In 2000, CUI became an Early Head Start grantee, the Agency provides infant/toddler and preschool center-based programs.

Since health and nutrition are key components of CUI's core philosophy, CUI contracts with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) under their Child & Adult Care Food Program to provide nutritious meals – breakfast and lunch -- to all enrolled children.

To support our philosophy of economic integration, CUI also enrolls children from families with the means to pay full tuition, which allows CUI classrooms to more closely reflect the enrollment of public school classrooms in the communities.

As funding from federal, state and local agencies becomes less certain, it has been increasingly challenging for the Agency to meet steadily rising operational costs. CUI relies on donations from individuals, corporations, and private foundations to meet specific needs as well as to help reduce the shortfall from other funding sources.

Duration of Head Start Programs

Since 2016, when Congress approved funding for Head Start agencies to offer Duration programming with a daily and annual schedule that aligns with public schools, CUI continues to increase the number of these classrooms for Pre-K children, as federal guidelines require. Currently, the requirement for Duration slots is 45% of funded enrollment, equaling 86 slots agency-wide.

Background

This report is prepared to comply with the Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 (Head Start Act 644A (2): “each Head Start Agency shall make available to the public a report published at least once in each fiscal year that discloses the following information from the most recently concluded fiscal year, except that reporting such information shall not reveal personally identifiable information about an individual child or parent”:

(A) Total HS-EHS Public and Private Funds Awarded to Communities United, Inc.

1. Public Funds:

a. Federal Head Start Grant	\$ 3,456,661
b. Federal Head Start Grant Training & Technical Assistance	\$ 39,541
c. Federal Early Head Start Grant	\$ 1,225,667
d. Federal Early Head Start Grant Training & Technical Assistance	\$ 11,439
e. USDA Child & Adult Care Food Program	\$ 197,723

2. Private Funds (required to meet the 20% funding match):

a. Non Federal Share of Head Start Grant	\$ 874,051
b. Non Federal Share of Early Head Start Grant	\$ 309,276

(B) Overview of funding available for the 2024-2025 School Year

	Budget for HS-EHS Fiscal Year February 1, 2024 – January 31, 2025	
Category	Basic Head Start	Early Head Start
Personnel	\$ 1,799,890	\$ 725,910
Fringe Benefits	552,563	222,852
Travel	0	0
Equipment	0	0
Supplies	52,931	8,746
Contractual	155,707	45,629
Other	935,111	233,968
Facilities/Construction	0	0
Total	\$ 3,496,202	\$ 1,237,105

	Budget for HS-EHS Fiscal Year February 1, 2024 – January 31, 2025	
Category	Basic Head Start	Early Head Start
Personnel	\$ 1,808,830	\$ 724,606
Fringe Benefits	551,696	221,007
Travel	0	0
Equipment	0	0
Supplies	33,089	8,797

Contractual	217,409	44,118
Other	885,178	238,577
Facilities/Construction	0	0
Total	\$ 3,496,202	\$ 1,237,105

(C) Statistics on Total Children and Families Served, as well as Monthly Enrollment:

- Total # of HS-EHS children served throughout the program year in center-based programs: **238**
- Total # of HS-EHS families served in center-based programs throughout the program year: **222**
- Average monthly enrollment of Head Start (as a percentage of funded enrollment): **80%**
- Average monthly enrollment of Early Head Start (as a percentage of funded enrollment): **100%**
- Percentage of Head Start children served qualifying at or below the federal poverty line **83%**
- Percentage of Early Head Start children served qualifying at or below the federal poverty line **82%**

(D) Monitoring Reviews:

Federal review by the Office of Head Start:

The Office of Head Start conducts Federal on-site monitoring reviews. These regular reviews provide CUI with invaluable feedback for ongoing improvement to its high quality, early education programming.

The Federal monitoring team conducts extensive overview that includes interviews with our Leadership team, Center Administrators, Education Managers, Teachers, Board members and Policy Council representatives. The Monitor's mandate is to determine that CUI is following all Head Start regulations. CUI had its FAI review conducted in the Spring and received positive feedback of our systems in place from the review lead. CUI was found to be operating in compliance and only one policy homeless children's medical records needed to be updated.

Independent Audit:

In addition to on-going, internal program monitoring and local self-assessment, Communities United Inc. receives an annual independent audit, which was performed by the audit firm of Kelly Vitale Raffol LLC. The most recent audit, conducted in Spring 2024, was for the period ending January 31, 2024. The audit resulted in no findings, no material weaknesses and no deficiencies of any sort. The full audit report is available for review at the Central Administrative offices of Communities United Inc., as well as at the Massachusetts State Attorney General's Office.

(E) Enrolled Children Who Received Medical and Dental Exams

Funding	% received medical exams	% received dental exams	% received oral health screening as part of well-child exam
Basic Head Start (BHS)	100%	98%	N/A
Early Head Start (EHS)	100%	98%	50%

(F) Family and Community Engagement

As part of its mission and philosophy, CUI is committed to systematic and integrated family engagement activities to achieve outcomes that result in children who are healthy and ready for school. Family Engagement occurs in all aspects of the agency and provides a wide variety of ways for parents to be involved. Engagement activities are grounded in positive, ongoing and goal-oriented relationships with families. These activities include:

- Two home visits and three teacher/family conferences yearly to enable staff to acquire a better understanding of each child's abilities and experiences, to share progress with parents, and to share activities, ideas, and materials which help parents/guardians in their role as their child's primary teacher.
- Volunteer activities, in such areas as Policy Council, Liaison to the Board of Directors, Health Services Advisory Committee (HSAC) and more.
- Guidance on community services to promote awareness and utilization of available resources, including the availability of an extensive Community Resource Guide.
- Monthly family trainings on topics such as Health & Safety, Family Literacy, Parenting, Transitions, Nutrition, Oral Health, Stress Management and Advocacy.
- Center and agency-wide family events that promote diversity and social connections and provide enrichment from the many cultures and ethnicities represented in our communities.
- STEM and literacy events to introduce activities that can be done in the home, which include the development of take-home activity kits.
- Parent/Guardian access to substitute teacher training, which provides familiarity with child development and appropriate practices with young children, as well as the opportunity to work as a substitute teacher in CUI programs (which may lead to permanent employment).
- Development of an ***Individual Family Engagement Plan***, which helps adults identify goals which can lead to self-enrichment, gainful employment or greater understanding of their role as their child's primary teacher.
- Participation in training and events regarding the transition to Kindergarten process, to ensure the child's and parents'/guardians' success in elementary school.
- Leadership development opportunities, through Family Committee meetings, Policy Council meetings, Parent groups.

- Legislative breakfasts and advocacy activities at the local and state level were offered to families to attend.



(G) School Readiness

Each year CUI develops a ***School Readiness Plan*** to ensure that all children are prepared when they enter kindergarten. This plan is based on the belief that it is everyone's responsibility to support children during the early years and that a strong partnership between families, educators, schools and communities is a key factor in determining children's future school success. According to the Office of Head Start, ***School Readiness*** is when children have the **"skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are necessary for success in school and for later learning throughout life."**

During the 2018-2019 school year, the Office of Head Start offered a Dual Language Learning (DLL) Academy with a focus to address the growing numbers of children and families whose primary language is other than English. CUI convened a multi-disciplinary team, that included Program Directors, Education Managers, Social Service staff, Educators and a parent to participate. Included with the DLL Academy was a survey that was completed by all parents/guardians, staff, Board members and Policy Council members, agency wide. The primary result indicated a need to strengthen DLL health service information. In consultation with our Governing bodies, it was decided that we maintain this health service focus for the 2023-24 program year with updated health related home and school activities, handouts and articles in the multiple, predominant languages of our families.

CUI is committed to preparing children and families for a lifelong journey of learning. Our ultimate goal is to develop ***Ready Families, Ready Educators, Ready Schools, Ready Children and Ready Communities.***

Preparation for kindergarten begins at the initial home visit, which takes place before the child begins attending a CUI program. Through interviews and documentation, CUI staff members obtain information about the child's developmental progress and the parent's/guardian's goals for the child entering the school year. This conversation continues at registration and orientation as the child begins attending the program. The teaching staff

complete an initial preschool assessment, which is the teacher's assessment of the child in 5 areas:

- Social-Emotional Development
- Language and Literacy
- Math
- Creativity
- Physical Development

Information obtained through parent/guardian interviews and this initial assessment allows the teaching staff to individualize curriculum to meet the child's needs and the parent's/guardian's goals for the child.

Throughout the year, the teaching staff record observations of the child's progress in the following areas:

- Social/Emotional
- Approaches to Learning
- Language, Literacy
- Math
- Science
- Creative Arts
- Physical Health



These observations assist the teaching staff in completing child outcomes/assessments, using the research-based Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment tool, in the Fall, Winter and Spring. These outcomes allow the teaching staff to track the child's progress and to continue to individualize curriculum to meet that child's ongoing needs. Parents/Guardians receive feedback about their child's progress formally at three family conferences, and informally throughout the year.

CUI also utilizes a ***Transition to Kindergarten*** checklist, which assists the teaching staff in helping both the child and the parent/guardian make a smooth transition from our programs

to kindergarten. Teaching and social service staff help the parent/guardian identify which kindergarten program the child will be attending. Our staff obtain key information to aid in the family's transition, including details about the documentation needed for enrollment, registration dates and visiting dates. This information is shared with the parent/guardian and assistance is provided by CUI staff to help them obtain all of the documents required for kindergarten enrollment.

CUI invites kindergarten teachers, principals and assistant principals to attend CUI sponsored virtual workshops and family committee meetings, which allow parents/guardians to learn more about the kindergarten program and to ask questions in smaller, more intimate settings. CUI staff encourage parents/guardians to attend transitional or kindergarten workshops held by their child's prospective school to gain a better understanding of the kindergarten their child will attend.

The CUI teaching staff conduct classroom activities designed to familiarize the child with kindergarten. Teachers integrate the topic of kindergarten into curriculum through relevant books and materials. Each child transitioning to kindergarten receives a transition book about kindergarten and packets of information for the parents, including at home activities to do during the summer to help the child prepare for kindergarten.

The Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework is CUI's primary guide in implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum and assessment that aligns to our school readiness goals and tracks children's progress across the Five Essential Domains. Teaching Strategies GOLD data is collected three times a year and used to determine how our children are doing in each of the Domains. This data is analyzed by our Director of Early Childhood Education and Education Managers. The results of this analysis are shared with the Policy Council, the Board of Directors and Family Committees who use the data to assess the impact of our program options.

Spring 2024 GOLD Assessment Data (summarized below, comparing Spring to Fall results) shows the impact that our program has had on meeting the educational needs of children in our programs.

3 year olds- Fall 2024/Spring 2025

Domains	Below Expectation	Meets/Exceeds Expectation
<i>Social Emotional Domain</i>	9%	91%
<i>Gross/Fine Motor Domain</i>	10%	90%
<i>Language Domain</i>	14%	86%
<i>Cognitive Domain</i>	19%	81%
<i>Literacy Domain</i>	19%	81%
<i>Math Domain</i>	10%	90%

4 year olds - Fall 2024/Spring 2025

Domains	Below Expectation	Meets/Exceeds Expectation
<i>Social Emotional Domain</i>	12%	88%
<i>Gross/Fine Motor Domain</i>	2%	98%
<i>Language Domain</i>	11%	89%
<i>Cognitive Domain</i>	11%	89%
<i>Literacy Domain</i>	11%	89%
<i>Math Domain</i>	12%	88%

Appendix 1

Facilities

Communities United currently operates four early childhood centers, shown below.

Lexington Creative Start

55 Coolidge Avenue
Lexington, MA 02420
(781) 462-3054

Waltham Creative Start

169 Elm Street
Waltham, MA 02453
Phone: (781) 647-0542

Woburn Creative Start

470 Wildwood Avenue
Woburn, MA 01801
Phone: (781) 932-9578

CUI also operates one other facility, which conducts a variety of activities to serve children and families and meet the agency's mission:

Administrative Office
500 West Cummings Park Suite 6000
Woburn, MA 01801
(617) 744-6076

Appendix 2 **Community Resources**

Information about CUI and all of its programs is available on our website at:
www.communitiesunitedinc.org

