

Communities United, Inc.

CREATIVE START CHILDREN'S CENTERS

AGENCY SELF-ASSESSMENT 5 YEARS IN REVIEW

[FEBRUARY 2014-JANUARY 2019]

*Ensuring the Success of the Child,
Empowering the Family, and
Strengthening the Community.*



COMMUNITIES UNITED, INC.
CREATIVE START CHILDREN'S CENTERS
WWW.COMMUNITIESUNITEDINC.ORG

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Mission & History

Mission

Communities United Inc. (CUI) is a community based private nonprofit organization that continually strives to provide high quality comprehensive education and family services to a diverse population of children, ages 0-5 years, and their families. A core component of our mission is to ensure the success of the child, empower the family and strengthen the community.

History

In 1970, a group of concerned parents, town officials and community volunteers formed Communities United, Inc., then a pilot program supported solely by Head Start funding with the purpose of providing comprehensive services in education, social services, health and parenting. At that time, CUI served a preschool population of 3-5 year olds for half-days in five communities. By 1980, the staff had grown to 50 and the program served 180 children.

Over the next ten years, the number of staff and children served doubled. The need for full-day childcare became a growing issue, and by 1995 CUI becomes a lead agency for state-funded Community Partnership Grants (CPG). CPG provided tuition subsidies enabling families to afford full day care for their children.

Today, the agency's 80 employees serve approximately 350 children, of infant, toddler and preschool age, from eleven unique suburban communities along the Rte. 128 belt. These communities are Arlington, Belmont, Brookline, Burlington, Lexington, Needham, Newton, Waltham, Watertown, Wellesley and Woburn.

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5-Year Grant Cycle in Review

CUI's 5-year grant cycle ended January 31, 2019 and we are taking an introspective look at where this journey began and the many, successful accomplishments. During this grant cycle, we served over 1,600 Head Start and Early Head Start children and their families. We strengthened collaborative partnerships with parents, strived to ensure the success of children and empowered parents in their role as their child's primary educator. By implementing the Head Start supportive comprehensive services, we strengthened parents as confident advocates, trained and hired parents as Substitute Teachers, and nurtured the decision-making abilities of those serving on Policy Council.

As we reflected on our 2014 to 2019 grant cycle, we celebrated our Program Improvement Plan achievements.

5 Year Program Goals (2014-2019)

- 1** Communities United, Inc. will provide the necessary support so that the children enrolled will demonstrate progress in the cognition and knowledge domain with an emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) skills.
- 2** Communities United, Inc. will work in partnership with families to advance the children's ability to establish and display trust and emotional security, self-awareness, self-regulation, and positive relationships with others.
- 3** In order to retain staff, Communities United, Inc. will integrate a staff wellness focus throughout the agency to foster happy, healthy, resilient employees who are committed to our agencies ongoing mission.
- 4** Communities United, Inc. will increase Parent, Family and Community Engagement to ensure positive outcomes for children and families.



Ensuring the Success of the Child

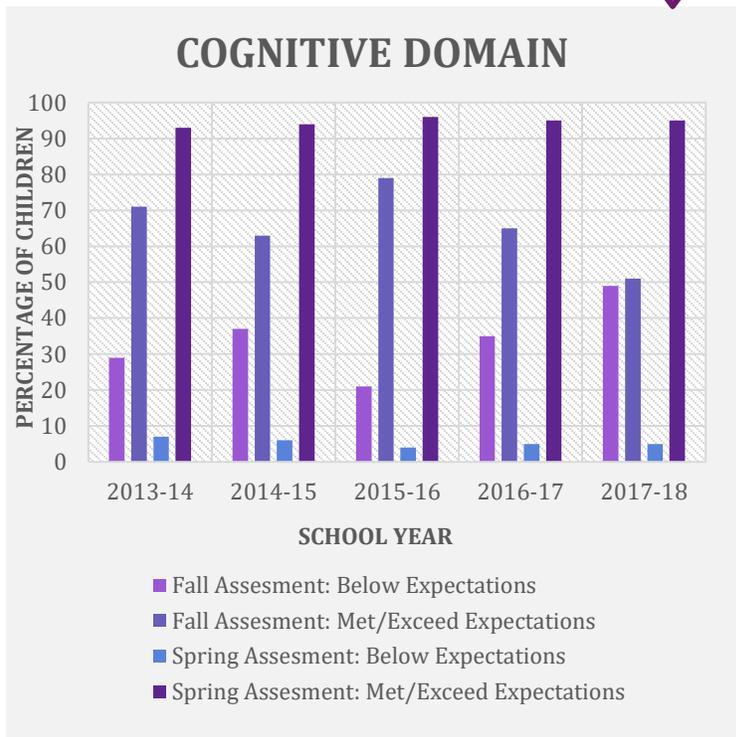
Leading the Way in STEM Education!

- Innovative STEM Curriculum
- Annual STEM Event Exhibitors
- STEM Event Keynote Speakers



CUI introduced Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) into each classroom's curricula. Targeted, supportive and ongoing instructional training of staff has led to increased cognitive outcomes as seen in the 5-year comparative graph. We celebrated our teaching teams, as they rose to the challenge, and demonstrated a mastery of the STEM model in all classrooms. CUI facilitated STEM events for children, families and surrounding communities.

The 5-year comparative graph indicates the impact STEM has on child cognition outcomes and achievements.



Ensuring the Success of the Child



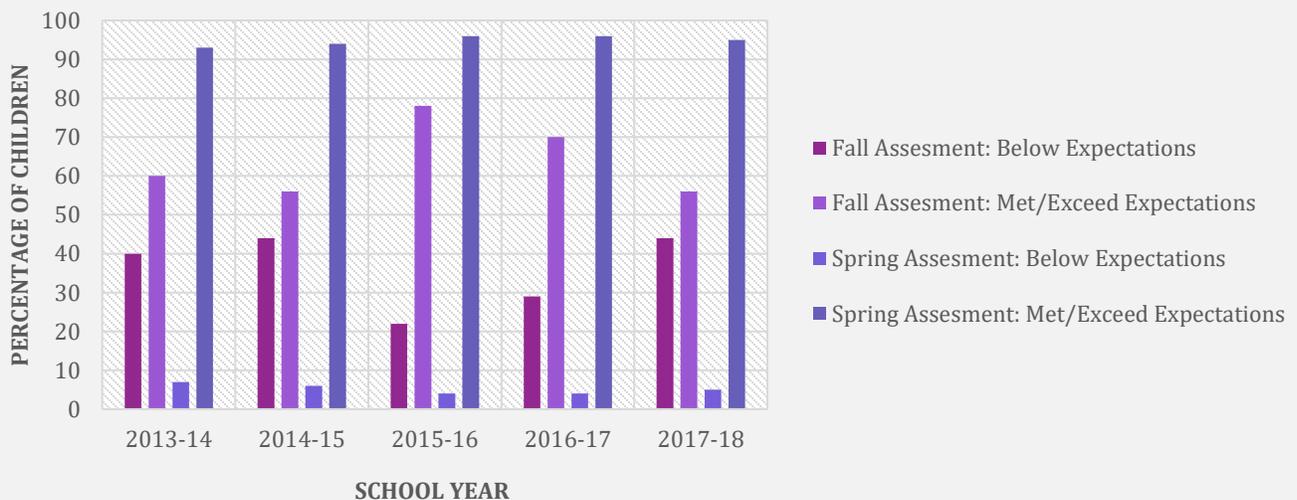
- **Second STEP**
- **Baby Doll Circle Time Curriculum**
- **CSEFEL: Pyramid Model**
- **CSEFEL: Parenting Solutions**

CUI introduced the *Second Step: Social-Emotional Learning tool* for preschoolers where Mental Health Specialists presented weekly lessons on social emotional skills such as empathy, self-regulation and problem solving. CUI added the *Baby Doll Circle Time* that promotes meaningful adult/child relationships for infants & toddlers.

Mental Health Specialists facilitated trainings developed by the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL): Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence in Infants and Young Children. CUI expanded the model to include a 6-module training, *CSEFEL: Parenting Solutions for Families*. This tool teaches positive and effective parenting skills which promote children’s social and emotional development and addresses challenging behavior, which in turn supports the mental health needs of their children.



SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DOMAIN

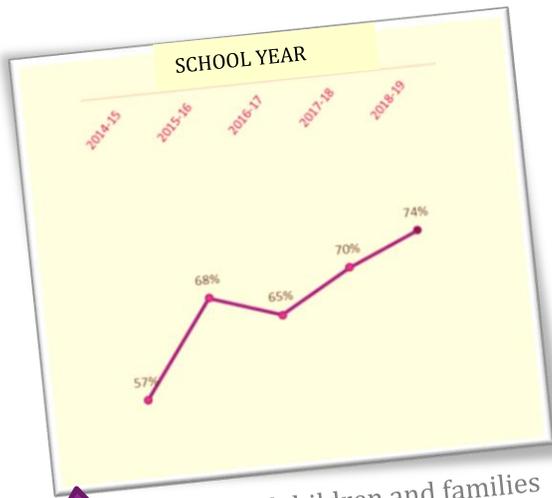


▲ The 5-year comparative graph shows the compelling improvements of Social Emotional outcomes for children served by CUI.

Ensuring the Success of the Child

CUI recognizes an increasing number of children and families with home languages other than English. CUI supports home language as it is the foundation for developing English language skills. Our educators speak over 15 languages, providing home language support to our DLL children and families.

- Honoring parents as their child's first teacher
- Supporting Home Language Development
- Dual Language Learner Academy Team



In 2014, 57% of children and families were Dual Language Learners (DLL). By 2018, the percentage increased to 74%.



Parents celebrated their graduation from the *Opening Doors Parenting Program* that honors and supports parents in their roles as family leaders and their child's first and most influential teacher leading to positive health and educational outcomes for children.

In 2018-19, CUI participated in Head Start's DLL Academy, assembled a multidisciplinary team and conducted the DLL Program Assessment. The surveys were completed by Staff, the Board of Directors, Policy Council and parents. After analyzing the results, a strategic plan is being formulated to strengthen Health and Transition practices for the benefit of DLL families.



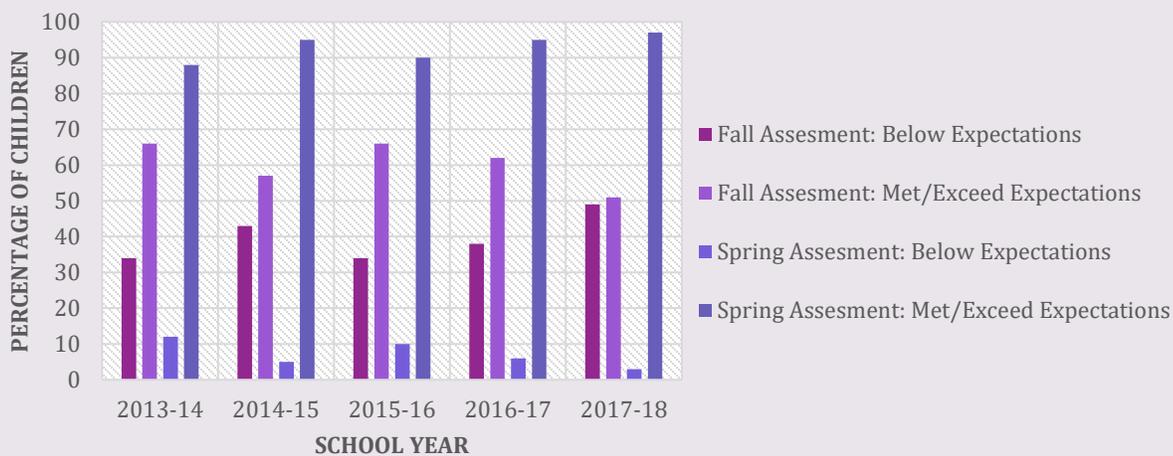
Cristina Alvarado, Kim Baldasaro, Huboshi Dareng, Phoebe Wen, and Danielle Coles (not pictured)

Ensuring the Success of the Child

CUI implements the Planned Language Approach (PLA), a comprehensive, systemic, research-based practice for Head Start and Early Head Start programs to ensure optimal language and literacy services for children who speak English and for those who are DLLs. The PLA is designed to build and refine language and literacy skills for all children, as well as a tool to promote staff development. This approach helps DLLs develop their home language and move toward proficiency in English.

- **Planned Language Approach**
- **Literacy Challenge**
- **Lending Libraries**

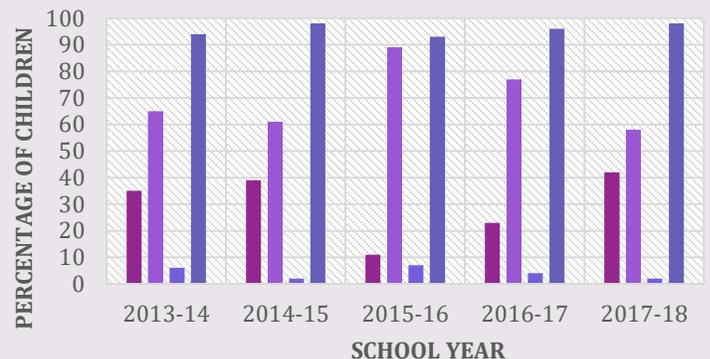
LANGUAGE DOMAIN



These graphs indicate the progress achieved in the Language and Literacy Domains for all children.



LITERACY DOMAIN



Guest readers at CUI centers have become a part of instilling a love for reading. Reading to young children helps stimulate the part of the brain that allows them to understand the meaning of language & helps build key language, literacy and social skills.

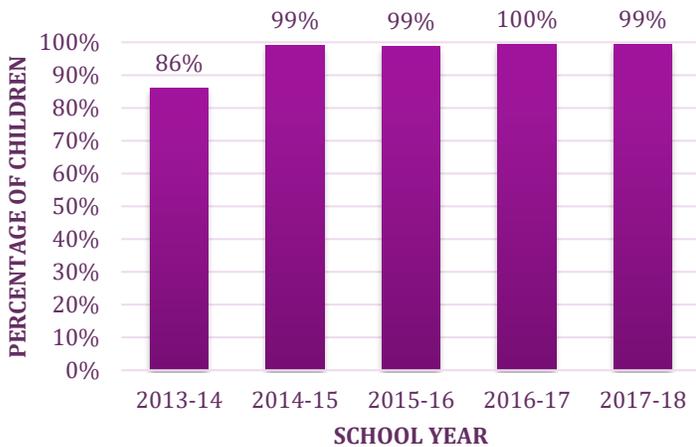
Empowering the Family

CUI takes pride in having dedicated staff to support families. The Health Coordinator supports educators, children and families by providing health-related workshops and classroom activities. Our Social Service teams works with each family to ensure access to medical and oral health care in their community. CUI maintains lists of the practitioners, in our service areas, available to provide the services our families may need.

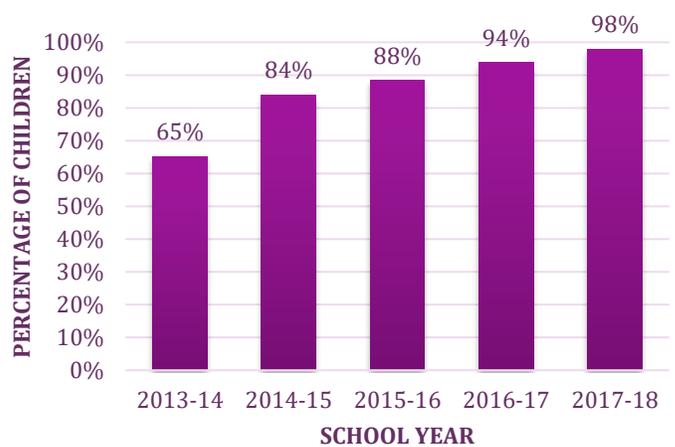
- **Agency Health Coordinator**
- **Dedicated Social Service Teams**
- **Medical & Oral Health Partners**



Medical Home



Dental Home



▲ The graphs above demonstrate our commitment to increase and sustain access to medical and oral health for children.

Empowering the Family

Commitment to Wellness!



- Improving Awareness
- Increasing Participation in Wellness Activities
- Inspiring Healthier Eating Habits



Since being awarded the Massachusetts Working on Wellness grant in 2016, CUI embraced the wellness model, developed a Staff Wellness Initiative and created a unique logo, **CUfit**. Agency-wide wellness events are implemented for staff, parents and children. We developed monthly wellness challenges and bi-annual events for staff, created Strengthening Families wellness workshops for parents and implemented *I Am Moving, I Am Learning* for children. CUI remains committed to promoting staff, parent and child wellness as a guiding principle.



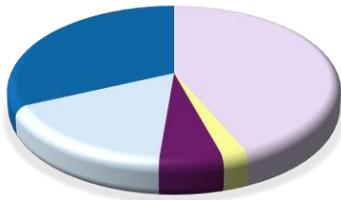
Empowering the Family

Engaging Families!

CUI uses an Individual Family Engagement Plan modelled on the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework. Our Social Service staff assist families with identifying personal goals, support their progress and provide community resources, referrals and follow-up.

- Supporting Family Goals
- Cultivating Advocacy
- Fostering School Readiness

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT GOALS



- Family Well Being
- Families Connections to Peers/Community
- Positive Parent-Child Relationships
- Families as Lifelong Learners
- Family Engagement in Transitions

▲ The graph above shows a sample of goals chosen by families.



▲ The above photos show families participating in ongoing advocacy efforts including visiting the State House and Legislators' school visits. Parents and families shared stories about engaging in their children's education and advocating for their families' needs.

Empowering the Family

Inspired by the guiding principles of the Head Start Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework, CUI builds positive and goal-oriented relationships between parents, families and community partners. Using this framework, we provide supportive comprehensive services that promote personal achievements for children and families.

- **Empowering Families**
- **Building Relationships**
- **Promoting Achievements**

Newton-Watertown Creative Start

When my twin boys began Head Start, I did not feel confident in my English skills. As a native Spanish speaker, I wanted to teach my children English and Spanish. The Newton-Watertown Creative Start team referred me to a community ESL class where I became more confident in my speaking and writing skills.

My children loved their school and I participated so much! I attended parent meetings, volunteered in the classroom and became a voting member on the Policy Council. I am so grateful to Newton-Watertown Creative Start for giving me the opportunity to support my children's development and to improve my English. I will continue to help with my children's education. Thanks to the support I received and the advocacy I learned to embrace at Newton-Watertown Creative Start.

I succeeded in becoming a strong advocate for my children and CUI.

- C. Gomez



Waltham Creative Start

All three of my children have attended Waltham Creative Start, either in the preschool or Home Visiting programs. My husband and I have been actively involved and highly engaged with the program as well. We value the nurturing relationships that have developed between our family and the supportive staff in Waltham.

I completed substitute teacher training in Waltham this year, and have been part of interviews for new hires here. I was invited to participate in the DLL Academy this year, to contribute a parent point of view as CUI works to strengthen its support of Dual Language Learners. My husband and I have attended field trips, Week of the Young Child activities, and many school events, in addition to volunteering often in our children's classrooms. My husband attended Advocacy Day at the State House, and we have also attended Waltham's yearly Legislative Breakfasts. My son was accepted to the Waltham Public School's Dual Language Program for kindergarten, and I am excited that my daughter will also be attending the Dual Language Program beginning in September.

I am so fortunate that this school has helped both my children and my husband and I to grow. As I have told them before, coming here makes it feel like my child is still at home.

- H. Dareng



Empowering the Family

Woburn Creative Start

As a mother of twin boys you can imagine my busy schedule. When my boys turned three, I began looking for a school for them. I couldn't believe how much money some of the schools charged. Even though my husband is a veteran, we couldn't catch a break. Then I received a miracle, a phone call from Woburn Creative Start. This was a blessing as most of the schools didn't provide financial aid so I took a leap of faith and accepted the placement for my boys.

This decision was truly the best one I made. The school not only provided me with care for my children but also the opportunity to advance my career. Ever since the boys were born, I stopped working as I could no longer bartend into the late nights and be available for my boys. Being a first time mom with twins, I didn't know what to do. Every cry, every smile made me want to learn more about children. I began my research by studying and reading all the books I could about early childhood development. I was so grateful when I realized that Woburn Creative Start offered a substitute teacher program for parents. This was a stepping stone to realizing a new career.



I now leave my boys in the hands of others but what relieved me the most was that I was able to stay as long as I needed each day. This was not only good for my boys to be able to explore a new environment knowing that I was there but it was also good for me being able to see what each day consisted of. The teachers poured out their hearts and gave my boys so much love and security. They provided them with a structure and routine which supported them in doing things on their own with confidence. The boys have come so far in achieving many milestones and I am so grateful for this.

As a working mother now, I am blessed that I can trust Creative Start so completely with the two who are closest to my heart. The school cares for them not only well but sweetly like a family. Loving them as I would when we are apart. I am thankful each day that I have Woburn Creative Start. Thank you for the care and love you give. I do not know where we would be without you.

-S. Cole and family.



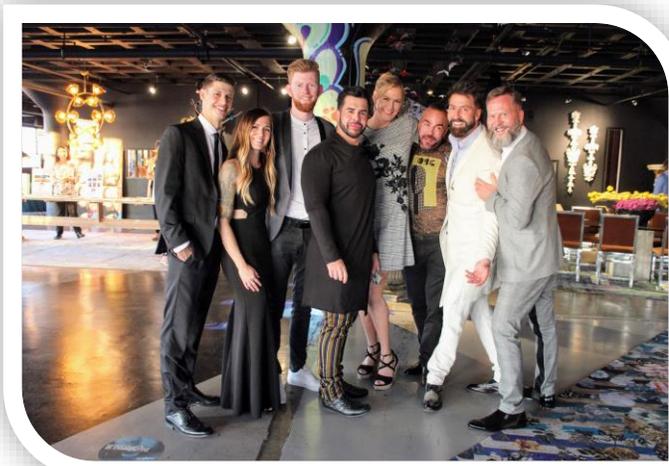
Strengthening the Community

Expanding Fundraising!

Four years ago, CUI held the first Annual Gala and Innovation Day events, which are supported by business volunteers from our surrounding communities, and held at each site. We continue to hold an Annual Gala and site-sponsored Innovation Day events.

- Collaborating Community Partners
- Cultivating Donors
- Inspiring Sponsors

▼ Annual Gala at Favrealous Factory



Innovation Day sponsored by Comcast Cares
▼ Team & Grace Chapel



▲ Grand re-opening of Woburn Center



▲ CUI supporters Mr. & Mrs. Carey

Strengthening the Community

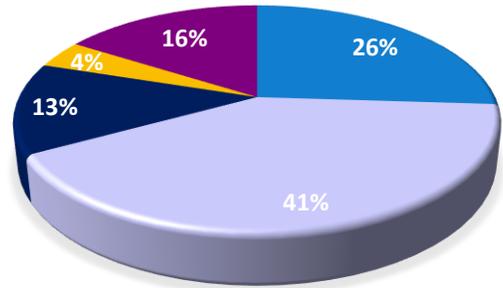
CUI continually invests in educational advancement and agency-wide there is a sense of pride for staff achievements! Employees are provided with tuition assistance, resources, referrals, and administrative support to attain a higher degree.

- **Degreed Educators in Every Classroom**
- **Ongoing Professional Development**
- **Dedicated Team of Professionals**



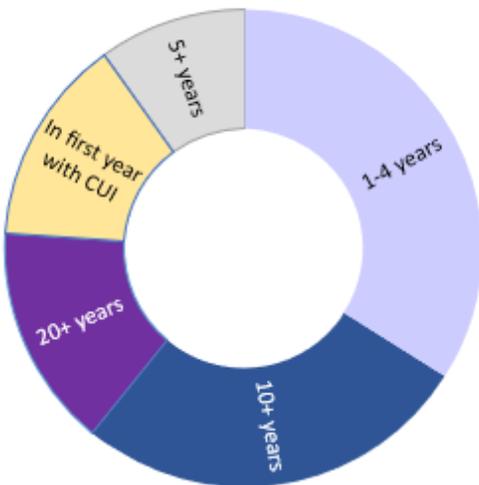
EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The graph shows employees' educational achievements. 67% of employees have a Bachelor or Master's degree.



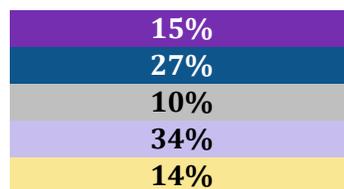
- Master's Degrees
- Bachelor Degrees
- Associate Degrees
- CDA
- Working on furthering their education beyond High School

Years of Service with CUI



CUI's commitment to staff retention is highlighted in the graph, which shows 42% of employees have been with CUI for over 10 years.

Percentage of Employees



Leadership Team

Board of Directors

Chairman, Harry Carey
Treasurer, Maa-Ablah Apo
Clerk, Helene Forte
Matthew St. Germaine
Elizabeth Ching
Molly De John
Janet Fogel
Jack Myers

Advisory Committee

Dr. Gretchen Bravacos
John Caldwell
Sara Kahana
Amy Mc Callen

Policy Council Members

Chairwoman, Enid Landreth
Fernanda Velasquez
Nicanora Teodolino
Grigory Hakimov
Karen Harkins
Chuurly Gomez
Rina Shrestha
Diana Bonia

Senior Leadership Team

Executive Director, Terri Natale
Head Start & Early Head Start Director, Julie Gillcrist
Director of Early Childhood Education, Sylvia Dandrata
Director of Family & Community Engagement, Kimberly Baldasaro
Director of Enrollment, Megan Sharkey
Accounting Manager, John Soehle

Communities United, Inc.
Enabling Young Children to Succeed



Communities United, Inc.

Creative Start Children's Centers



50th Anniversary Celebration

Ensuring the Success of the Child, Empowering the Family, and Strengthening the Community.

February 1970 – February 2020



We cordially invite you to join us!

Event Location

Grace Chapel, Lexington

Adult Learning Center

2 Militia Dr, Lexington, MA 02421

Date

February 8, 2020

Time

10:00 am-2:00 pm



DETAILS
COMING SOON!



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