



Listening on the Edge of Your Seat

## Leaders in Action for Worthy Wages

The field of early care and education in the U.S. is in crisis. Parents can't afford to pay and teachers can't afford to stay. After years of mobilizing a public awareness campaign around this crisis, we are beginning to see a number of state initiatives underway aimed at enhancing quality and staff stability.

But missing at the decision making table where these initiatives are crafted are the very people who spend their days with children—teachers and providers. Their voices are not heard and their leadership is unacknowledged. To address this concern, the Center for the Child Care Workforce (CCW) has developed an annual summer Leadership Institute to steadily gather this under-represented workforce for an opportunity to expand their leadership skills and potential.

The Institute uses innovative strategies for helping people identify themselves as leaders, connect with others, gain further knowledge and skills, and develop strategies to organize for change. Central to the success of this leadership development and movement building effort is a commitment to understanding and transforming the dynamics of racism, power and privilege.

The summer Leadership Institute and the ongoing Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP) seeks to change the face of leadership in the field of early care and education. To date, those identified as leaders in this profession are not teachers and providers. Nearly all of our publically identified professional leaders are white. But make no mistake about it women of color are powerful leaders in their communities, churches and families. These under-represented voices must shape the leadership that develops initiatives and builds a movement to transform the child care crisis. The summer Leadership Institute is dedicated to helping this happen.

## Listening on the Edge of Your Seat

Leadership grows when people are encouraged to listen closely and learn from each others' stories and experiences. Often this involves shifting our perspective and walking in someone else's shoes. The commitment we make as we begin the Leadership Institute is to "Listen on the Edge of Our Seats," which means we are committed to truly hearing each other and opening ourselves to each other's wisdom and experiences.



"At these gatherings I'm listened to, appreciated and accepted for where I'm at. I see and hear other people's stories about their leadership, both peers and mentors. There is recognition that the kind of leadership I can provide and my story is important. I get the feeling that there is hope and possibility, that whatever we want to make happen will happen. You can feel the energy that is generated and that convinces and energizes me. I see people feeling comfortable about being honest and speaking from their hearts." Barb Wiley, Seattle

## Redefining Professional Development

Many teachers and providers in the early childhood field don't find it easy or meaningful to attend college classes. We work all day, often with a second job to make ends meet. Taking on student loans is out of the question. It's different at the Leadership Institute. Scholarships are easy to access. Participants choose a core area to focus in over the course of four days. In addition, there are inspirational speakers and anti-oppression sessions for all to attend, and opportunities for people to meet in state and/or affinity groups.



"This is so different from any other class or conference I have attended. I feel like I belong to a group, not just working by myself. Staying in the same core area sessions for the week means we get to know people. We can then stay in touch, call each other and keep getting ideas. When I took classes at the college the teacher just followed things in the book. I wish it could have been like this where I learn so much more about the field. This is the only professional development where I also see those who are parents can bring their children. This really helps. It is good for the children. When we were in the circle raising our hands and saying 'Basta!', Jaiden did it right along with us."  
Lily Kuo, Seattle, WA

"The Leadership Institute is a moment for me to get away on a vacation where I'm going to be around friends and peers that admire me. It's an uplifting experience. The Institute staff makes sure they pick places to pamper yourself. I hate to give it up but I have to step back so others can enjoy the feeling. It allows me to grow and move on, and others to grow too. It's a good experience. Now I know what direction I need to go when I go back home." Serena Spearman, Philadelphia, PA

## Learning from Our Lives and Experiences



The Leadership Institute and the Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP) are structured so that we all see ourselves as teachers and learners. We acknowledge that we are all experts on our own lives and experiences. When we re-visit our experiences with an analysis of how systems of power and privilege work, we feel a fire begin to burn in us and we want to fight for justice. As we find our voices and move into leadership positions, we become trainers and mentors for others- each one reach one, each one teach one.

"Here I can see that I'm more than just a little family day care provider. I'm a leader, a mentor, and foremost, a teacher with a degree in my community. I worked hard for that. What I'm finding is when we put a name on ourselves like "baby sitter", it stabs me. It's a stigma. Now my goal is to help family providers educate themselves so they can believe in themselves and be all they can be. I talk to older family providers and they are very fearful. We have providers with such low self-esteem. They have that leadership ability but don't know how to bring it out. Your job is to see yourself as a person responsible to motivate others. I have that power and I want to give it to them to grow. Serena Spearman

"I've gone from being a toddler teacher to a trainer and now I'm back in the toddler room. Being with Kids keeps me honest. And I know that when I'm advocating for me, I'm advocating for them. At the Institute I see that it's the same issues everywhere. If we all got together and said what our three big issues are, they'd have to listen. I wish the teachers in my program were here. They'd learn things that would be useful to them in the classroom, like about diversity and racism. This is one of the only places where you can say what you need and people hear you." Angie Roberson, Greensboro, NC



## Building Relationships

The heart of building any movement is the development of strong relationships. At the Leadership Institute we take the time to build genuine, lasting connections with each other. We stay in touch over the year and each summer we re-unite, hear stories of what we have accomplished, and meet



emerging leaders. It is unique to be able to have face-to-face conversations with people from around the country, from different work settings, cultural backgrounds, and ages.

"I just never feel better about myself than when I'm here. It is the most supportive environment I have ever been in. You can do and say anything without being afraid. Nobody else does that when they plan a conference. I'm more comfortable asking questions that I wouldn't ask in a different environment. There is not only an emotional commitment, but a financial commitment to teachers and providers with scholarships. And back at home, I can now speak up and go to those decision making tables without being interrupted or disrespected." Julia Townsend, Fitchburg, WI



## Holding Each Other Up and Combining Our Inner Strengths

Feeling isolated is a common experience of many child care providers. Our work is stressful and we long to talk with others about what we are thinking and doing. When we come together we discover our inner strengths and use them to take care of each other. The Leadership Institute gives us lots of time to talk, relax, laugh, cry and learn



from each other. We let ourselves be angry over the injustice of it all. We discover the leadership qualities we have and challenge ourselves to learn more. Together we become a mighty force to be reckoned with.



"This is one of the few meetings I come to where because I work directly with children, I'm considered a VIP! The people here offer me respect and admiration and I'm valued for the work I do. I get a sense that I can be a leader when I hear what other people have accomplished. The idea exchanges with others help me think of how I can do this in my community."

Dawn Abel, Madison, WI



"I believe that coming together like this from all parts of the country gives us the richness that we believe in. It makes me angry that after all these years we still haven't been able to walk the talk about the value of this work. I've been in the field for 28 years. I used to say it is one of the most important jobs. Now, after this Institute, I can say it is the most important job.

Gloria Martinez, Denver, CO

## Learning to Take Risks

Becoming a leader means getting comfortable with risk. For some, taking even the smallest risk is a big challenge. For others, risk has been an everyday experience of our lives. The Leadership Institute offers activities for us to practice risk taking across racial and cultural lines, to practice speaking or performing in front of a group, and to explore things outside our comfort zone.



"Everything I do the first time is hard. I just wanted to be a LEAP player in this skit. Once you do it the first time, you can always say 'I did it before, I can do it again.' And I did it!"

Marcelina Johnson, Dorchester, MA







## Shifting the Center

A goal of the summer Leadership Institute is to change the face of leadership in the field of early care and education. We want to not only change the faces, but the locus of power and the culture of how we are together. Author and college teacher, bell hooks calls this "shifting the center".

"As a white woman, one of the only times in my life I'm socializing and strategizing in a room that is culturally diverse is when I'm here. There's this built in place of privilege I've been born into. I've learned that if we aren't intentional about developing diverse leadership, it just won't happen. There are issues for teachers and providers of color that I might never think of or know about. People of color need to see someone in leadership that looks and talks like them so they can see their own leadership qualities. And, as a white woman, I know I have things to learn from people of color about community, because I think leadership comes out of a community setting. I grew up in a family and culture that values individualism and super independence. I need to be constantly reminded that relationships are what it's about, not just the bottom line or the deadline. We white women need to get beyond just using the word 'collaboration' and start doing it. We need to remember there isn't just one way to do things."

Christina Blalock, Greensboro, NC



# Preparing for Action



The Leadership Institute helps us see ourselves as agents of change and learn skills and strategies for taking action in our communities. We are guided to identify an issue of importance to us, analyze the dynamics, find our allies and develop an action plan. We practice through role plays, hear other success stories, and coach each other. We draw courage and inspiration as we learn about other social change movements and see our connections to them.

"The Leadership Empowerment Action Project (LEAP) has changed my life. It has opened awareness for action in my community. I felt isolated and found others that felt the same....and we had many things in

common. I was able to organize and strengthen my skills. Leap helped me become aware that I was not powerless and that I could be a part of influencing change." Terri Roston, Denver, Colorado





## Going Forth

A unique feature of the Leadership Institute is that we are continually looking back and looking ahead. We are learning about the history of our profession and are inspired by the movements for justice that came before us. We build dreams and visions together. We find what we really care about, learn to analyze the power dynamics of that issue, and explore possible change strategies. No one leaves without

an action plan. Some plans are for changes in our families, in our work places, and some are focused on reaching out to others in the community. Still others have the goal of a political rally or impacting public policy.

"Having completed the LEAP course, I realize that the possibilities are endless...

- Becoming a director or owning my own center
- Using my voice to promote quality and equity in the workplace
- Inspiring parents and educators to advocate for themselves"

Paquita Sims, Connecticut

"We put our differences together and come together to share a common cause to help build and support each other. We see we have the same commitments. It doesn't matter if we come from a center or family provider home. It's especially good to keep family providers uplifted because most of the places we go, we are forgotten. Here we get the strength to leap forward and develop strategies, knowing that future "leapers" will always have past "leapers" to support and help them in all their endeavors, passions, goals, whatever they are trying to succeed in. We will forever be united." Verna Aggie, Philadelphia

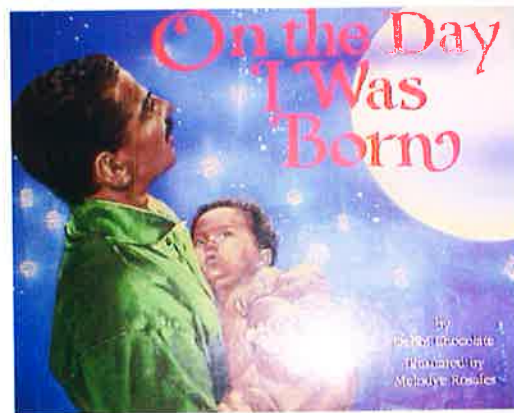




"This space is like a liberation zone."  
Val Brown



"Use your yardstick for self-measurement, not measuring others."  
Mary Bentley-Ford



# How are the children?

