



The History of Early Learning Indiana

Early Learning Indiana, formerly Day Nursery Association, is the oldest child care provider in the state of Indiana, and is one of the few multi-site non-profit child care agencies in the Indianapolis area.

Day Nursery was created in 1899 by the King's Daughters Society, which had provided clothing and food baskets to families in need. Wishing to expand their services, the King's Daughters established Day Nursery to provide care for the children of working mothers. By 1940, modern child care standards were established, and as the need for quality child care grew, Day Nursery's programs and services became recognized as the standard bearer of early childhood excellence. Early Learning Indiana continues to lead as a standard for high-quality child care, serving over 1,000 children in our 11 centers and sharing operational best practices across the industry.

THE KING'S DAUGHTERS SOCIETY

1890-1900: Creating Support for Working Mothers

Beginning in 1890, the King's Daughters Society outfitted under-privileged children and provided food baskets for the needy in the rapidly growing community. By 1899, these women began focusing on the need that working mothers had for child care. Day Nurseries had been started in several large cities, and the King's Daughters embraced the idea of establishing one in Indianapolis.



One of the founders, Grace Wood, said, “We had no money, no experience in organization, but we had plenty of enthusiasm.”

With what was surely radical thinking in Indianapolis at that time, the Society opened their day nursery. A room was rented at 911 West Washington Street. Friends donated a stove and furnishings for the comfort of the first patrons – a deserted mother and baby. They lived in the room and received milk and food. Later, another employed mother brought her baby to be cared for and was charged five cents per day for the service. Recognizing that their child care services had to be affordable, the fee was modest and supplemented by the Society’s “silver offering” teas. The fee, together with the gifts the Society solicited, provided the funds that supported the small care center. As the use of the service increased, the center was moved to 521 West Walnut.

THE DAY NURSERY ASSOCIATION

1901-1930: Finding Ways to Serve More Children

As more and more working mothers sought child care services, both the day nursery facility and the Society’s organization needed attention. In 1901, the group rented a house at 518 West Vermont. Then, on December 20, 1901, the Day Nursery Association was established. The Articles of Incorporation were drawn up and signed by Belle C. Wilson, Julia F. Walk, Grace H. Smith, Grace H. Brown, and Grace H. Wood.

Within a few years, the Vermont Street quarters became inadequate, and the adjoining property on the east was added. This was used for children left for the day only, while the main building housed children who boarded by the week. By 1927, to accommodate the agency’s growth, Day Nursery purchased a 15-room house and brick building at 542 Lockerbie Street, next door to the James Whitcomb Riley home. A gym/auditorium was added in 1941.



1931-1960: Establishing Quality Standards, Organizing Volunteers and Meeting Demand

By 1930, the nursery program had evolved from combined day and boarding care to exclusively daycare; and in 1940, modern child care standards were established. World War II created more demand for such services, and the mothers from all walks of life were served by the Day Nursery Association. As enrollment grew, so did the number of well-qualified staff members. The program was further strengthened by volunteer activity and cooperation with other organizations. Day Nursery was meeting the needs of wartime working mothers.

It was during this period that Day Nursery, originally organized by volunteers, began receiving the benefits of a new, energetic, and growing volunteer corps. In 1938, Mrs. James T. Cunningham, Association Board

member, organized the Junior Auxiliary. The Auxiliary's mission, then and now, includes raising money for the Association, providing volunteer services to the Day Nursery centers (nurseries), and promoting the work of Day Nursery to the community.

The Fletcher Day Nursery was added in 1946. This center remained in operation until the summer of 1956 when a new center, West Branch, was opened at 2402 West Michigan Street. The changes were made because of the Association's desire to be of more service to the community. In August 1971, West Branch was moved to 1105 South Blaine Avenue on property that was rented from the former Assumption Parochial School.

1961-1984: Building Capacity

Following a recommendation by the Health and Welfare Council (now known as the United Way), Day Nursery expanded its facilities by building a center at 3522 North Central Avenue. Dedication ceremonies were held for North Branch on April 12, 1964.

On November 20, 1970, the land at 855 North East Street was acquired, and a fundraising campaign was launched to build a new downtown branch to replace Lockerbie Street. Construction began in April and was completed in November 1971. It was named



the Day Nursery – Wiles Center in honor of Nellie Wiles who was a King's Daughter and a Day Nursery founder and benefactor. An open house with some 200 in attendance was held on April 16, 1972, to celebrate the opening of the new center. In 1979, more space was added to the Day Nursery – Wiles Center, bringing its capacity to 166 children.

On January 18, 1972, Day Nursery's Articles of Incorporation were updated, and the new version was approved unanimously.

On January 1, 1974, Day Nursery added a fourth center when it assumed operation of the ABC Day Care Center at 1012 Stafford Road, Plainfield, Indiana. The facility was owned by the Plainfield First Baptist Church.

In April 1974, North Branch added a prefabricated building, containing two classrooms, to the property. The enrollment of 50 more children brought the center's capacity to 130 and greatly reduced a long waiting list.





The organization then embarked upon a period when it continued to build capacity and became a trendsetter in the industry.

A program to provide support and training for family child care home providers began in September 1985. At the same time, Day Nursery instituted a resource and referral service, now called Child Care Answers (CCA). Parents seeking help in locating and evaluating child care can call CCA and receive information, tailored to their needs, from its database of more than 3,000 providers.

In May 1987, responsive to an opportunity to provide quality services, Day Nursery purchased the business of the Northside Family Child Development Center. Known as Day Nursery – Northside Center, Day Nursery provided child care in the same facility, leased from the owner. In 1995, Day Nursery purchased the facility and renovated it in 1996, maintaining capacity at 90 children. Due to continued problems with the building, it was closed in 2000.

Day Nursery assumed operation of a center caring for 90 children in the Minton-Capehart Federal building in May 1991. The center is now known as Day Nursery – Federal Center.

The North branch was renamed the Day Nursery – Lilly Center in appreciation of a \$2 million contribution from the estate of former board member, Ruth Allison Lilly.

Due to declining enrollment, West Branch closed in October 1979.

In September 1980, Day Nursery began operating a center located in Wishard Hospital, 1001 West 10th Street. Day Nursery – Medical Center serves 120 children.

In April 1984, the Plainfield Center was moved to a new site near Galyan's Trading Post in Plainfield. The center's capacity remained at 71 children. This center continued operation until September 1994 when it was moved to the new PSI building.

1985-2000: Setting Trends in Child Care Services

By 1985, Day Nursery was a mature, well-established organization. Year in and year out, the centers were providing a quality child care program for hundreds of children and their working or student parents. At the same time, the organization maintained its commitments to serve ethnically diverse clients and to offer tuition subsidies in accordance with the family income for the children of low- and middle-income parents.



The years 1993 and 1994 were ones of significant change and growth for Day Nursery. Infant care was introduced at Day Nursery – Wiles Center, reducing capacity to 160. Plans were drawn and construction completed for a new state-of-the-art child care center in Plainfield. This \$2.4 million joint venture by PSI Energy, the town of Plainfield, and Day Nursery yielded the Day Nursery – Community Child Care Center at 110 Dan Jones Road in Plainfield. The center opened in September 1994, and the capacity was increased to 160 children, ages infant to eight.

During 1993 – 1995, Day Nursery conducted a capital campaign to procure funds needed for an extensive renovation of the Day Nursery – Lilly Center. The most visible changes included razing the prefabricated classroom building and replacing it with two new classrooms attached to the center, providing new furniture and equipment, and constructing and equipping a new playground.

During 1994 and 1995, all Day Nursery playgrounds were replaced or upgraded.

Between 1993 and 1996, all Day Nursery centers received national accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Achieving and maintaining accreditation is a distinction shared by only 10% of child care centers nationwide.

In 1993, Day Nursery initiated an ongoing, professional fundraising program to increase public financial support. And in another effort to increase its financial strength, in 1995, Day Nursery began marketing Corporate Child Care Answers (CCCA) to employers as an employee benefit. Employers find this a cost-effective way to meet many employees' child care concerns. Day Nursery benefits financially through contracting with employers to provide them with child care resources, referrals and expertise.

In 1998, Day Nursery won the contract for operation of the child care center at the State Government Center. Day Nursery State Center, whose capacity is 135 children, brings the total of Day Nurseries to seven, serving more than 750 children.

2000 and beyond: Growth in our Second Century

In 2001, Day Nursery was awarded the contract for a child care center serving federal employees at facilities located at Ft. Benjamin Harrison. The building was designed and built specifically for child care. Day Nursery – Start Smart 4 Children Child Development Center opened in January 2002, and has a capacity of 107 children, including infants.



Day Nursery – Medical Center closed in October 2002 when Wishard Hospital expanded and converted the space to meet hospital needs.



In 2013, Day Nursery opened a new center to meet the demand of infant and toddler care in the community. The new center, located at 1030 W. 16th Street, can accommodate 60 infants and toddlers 6 weeks to 35 months old.

In October of 2003 Day Nursery opened a center near Methodist Hospital in partnership with Clarian Health Partners. The center was renamed the Day Nursery Indiana University Health Early Care and Education Center in 2010 to reflect a rebranding by the health care organization.



Also in 2003, Day Nursery took over the management of a child care center near 56th and Guion Road on Indy's Northwest side. The center remained at that location until 2009.

In 2014, Day Nursery partnered with two local charter schools, Phalen Leadership Academy and Vision Academy @ Riverside, to open pre-K classrooms in their schools.

In the summer of 2006, Day Nursery again partnered with Clarian Health, now IU Health, in the creation of a Hendricks County Early Care and Education center in Avon replacing the Day Nursery center in Plainfield which closed earlier that year. IU Health closed the Avon center in 2019.



In 2009, the Day Nursery Guion Road center moved from 56th and Guion to a new home in Park 100 on West 73rd Street. The center was renamed Day Nursery Northwest.



Also in 2014, Day Early Learning partnered with Eastern Star Church to address the growing need of preschool and Pre-K for low-income families that were accessing the On My Way Pre-K and Indianapolis Preschool Program funds. They opened 5 new preschool and pre-K classrooms in the church's location on East 30th Street. This

year also marked Early Learning Indiana receiving its first Early Head Start grant. The grant, awarded in December 2014 and implemented in June 2015, served an additional 88 infants and toddlers. This included 40 children at Day Early Learning Infants and Toddlers Center and two EHS Child Care Partnership sites with 24 seats at the East 10th Center for Children and Children's Village.



EARLY LEARNING INDIANA

2014-2022: Growing Vision, Growing Impact

In late 2014, after over 100 years of offering high-quality early care and education, Day Nursery changed its name to Early Learning Indiana to better reflect the work that they do. The center names were changed as well to Day Early Learning. The organization's goal is to continue being the area's best source for child care services and resources, while embracing a larger role as an advocate and leading voice for early childhood education. Early Learning Indiana's board of directors updated the organization's mission to reflect the new statewide focus.

In 2016, building on the broader focus, Early Learning Indiana received a \$20 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., to expand access and improve early childhood education quality across the state through a new initiative called Partnerships for Early Learners.

In 2019, with generous support from Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, Early Learning Indiana begins developing a competency-based early childhood workforce preparation program for teachers and classroom support roles that combines high-quality direct instruction with tailored, work-based learning opportunities.

In 2020, Early Learning Indiana was awarded an Early Head Start expansion to increase funded enrollment from 88 to 163 children. The additional seats included 32 at Day Early Learning at Eastern Star Church, 28 at Day Early Learning at Park 100 and 15 at Volunteers for America.

In the same year, Lilly Endowment Inc. renewed its commitment to Early Learning Indiana's mission through a \$15 million grant. The grant will help fund efforts to support the growth and sustainability of high-quality programs; expand programs' participation in the state's quality rating and improvement system; strengthen the early learning workforce through innovative models and partnerships; and create shared services to reduce persistent structural challenges within the early childhood system.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck Indiana and many providers closed, Early Learning Indiana opened its doors wider to serve the children of emergency responders and front-line essential workers. With the generous support of Lilly Endowment Inc., Early Learning Indiana launched the \$15 million Come Back Stronger Fund and helped 1,025 early learning providers safely operate and re-open during the pandemic.

In late 2020, as part of its efforts to reduce barriers to early childhood education access, Early Learning Indiana launched Early Learning Works to provide child care solutions to meet unique needs of employers and their employees to help reduce turnover and absenteeism, increase productivity and better recruit skilled employees.



In 2021, Early Learning Indiana moved two child care centers at Purdue University under its umbrella - Day Early Learning at Patty Jischke Early Care and Education Center and Day Early Learning at Purdue University Early Care and Education Center.

In 2022, Early Learning Indiana opened its newest Day Early Learning center at Manual High School, which is operated by Christel House. The center, Day Early Learning at Manual, is designed to serve 80 children, ages infant to 5 years, on Indianapolis' south side.



Today, Early Learning Indiana operates 11 child care centers, including 9 in the Indianapolis metro area and 2 locations at Purdue University.

The organization remains committed to action and advocacy that helps overcome longstanding systemic barriers and ultimately provides all Hoosier children with the quality care that empowers them with the essential skills they need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond.



From its beginnings in 1938 to today,

the Day Nursery Association, formerly the Junior Auxiliary, has been an active group of women dedicated to helping the littlest learners. The Auxiliary's mission is to make a difference in the lives of young children in Indiana by supporting Early Learning Indiana through fundraising, volunteerism and advocacy. Learn more by contacting Denise Hancock at 317-737-1222.



**Day Nursery
Auxiliary**