

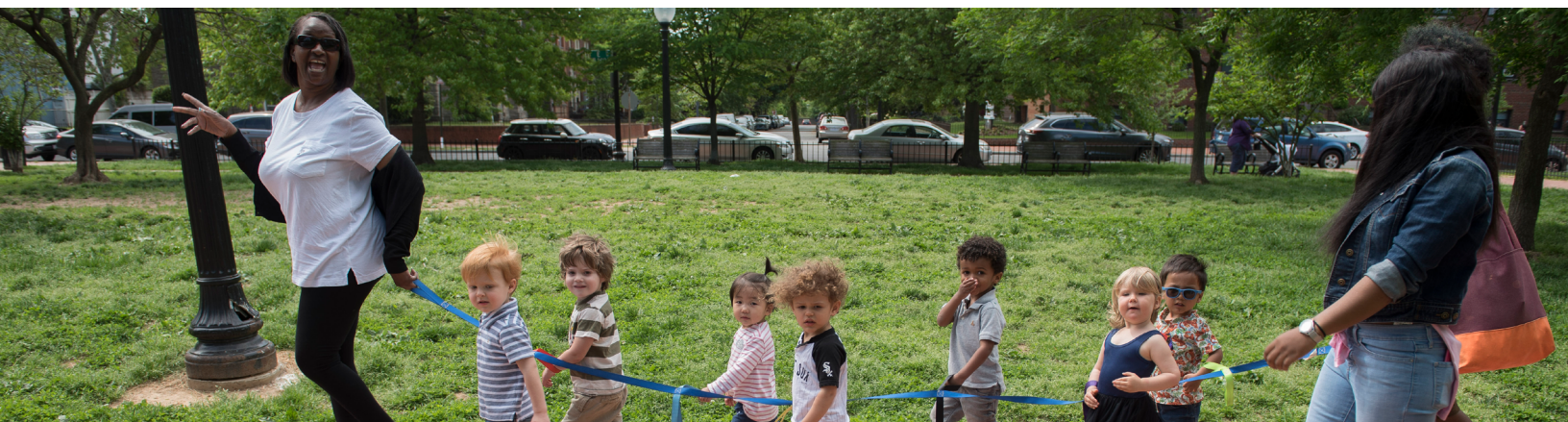
Enhancing Preparedness and Response Capabilities for Early Learning Providers, Families, and Children: Lessons Learned (2019-2021)

Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) agencies are a constant presence in local communities and serve as a resource for child care providers and families. While many other organizations show up after a crisis and leave after short-term recovery, CCR&Rs build local resilience, relationships, and expertise before, during, and long after a disaster occurs. With the proper support and resources, CCR&Rs can serve as resilience hubs that reduce, and possibly prevent, the suffering of people affected by disasters—especially those most vulnerable.

Child Care Aware® of America launched the *Enhancing Preparedness and Response Capabilities for Early Learning Providers, Families, and Children* project in 2019 to assist a group of CCR&Rs within a 10-state Midwest area with making sure child care providers, families, communities, and the CCR&Rs themselves are better prepared for disasters. *Many lessons were learned during that time that can be shared with other child care emergency preparedness, response, and recovery stakeholders.*

“A whole community approach is so effective and makes a big job feel doable.”

- CCR&R staff



The three overarching outcomes of the project included:



1. Training, Technical Assistance, and Resources:

CCR&Rs were better equipped with resources to offer child care emergency preparedness, response, and recovery training and provide technical assistance to child care providers within their communities.



2. Relationship Building:

CCR&Rs established relationships with state and local preparedness and response organizations and integrated child care needs into all levels and phases of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.



3. Disaster Ready CCR&Rs:

CCR&Rs increased their own disaster readiness so they can recover faster and support child care providers, families, and communities after a disaster.



CCR&Rs reported that the technical assistance topics requested most by child care providers were:

- Child care emergency plan development and revision
- Evacuation, relocation, shelter-in-place, and lock down procedures for child care programs
- Continuity of operations for child care programs
- Emergency and temporary child care services
- Procedures for communication and reunification with families

“It is possible to make an impact even if you need to start with small steps to get everyone on board. You must start where people are. You can build on the progress to ultimately reach your outcomes.”

- CCR&R staff

“Child care providers sometimes lack confidence when implementing emergency plans and the plans are often not complete. We learned that the best approach to address this is to provide one-on-one assistance.”

- CCR&R staff

Training, Technical Assistance, and Resources Examples from Participating CCR&Rs

Some participating CCR&Rs:

- Created an emergency planning video series for child care providers in the state. This series of short videos helps child care providers understand the requirements, forms, and supports available.
- Made electronic resources available, which was especially important for child care providers in rural areas, including a series of videos and a texting service. The texting service is a way to share essential information quickly in a way that is convenient to most people.
- Performed observations of child care evacuation drills and offered child care providers feedback and technical assistance based on the observations.
- Made online child care emergency preparedness training available.
- Recognized that resource templates were not always appropriate for family child care providers and helped get them updated.
- Placed an emphasis on family engagement in child care emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. They created resources for child care providers to share with families.



“We need to rely on trusted partners to distribute information, to provide collective resources, to establish a voice of ‘we’re in this together and we’re not going to work apart from one another.’”

- CCR&R staff



CCR&Rs were encouraged to approach groups they may not have reached out to in the past, such as emergency management and first responders. The importance of taking time to build relationships during blue sky days was stressed to increase the likelihood that trusted partners can be called upon before, during, and after a disaster.





Participating CCR&Rs established partnerships in a variety of areas, including:

- Afterschool programs
- Child care licensing
- Child care providers
- City/county leadership
- Colleges/universities
- Community disaster coalitions
- Community organizations
- Disabilities-focused organizations
- Early childhood coalitions
- Economic development
- Emergency managers
- First responders
- Homeland security
- Mental health organizations
- Office of Early Childhood
- Public health
- Public schools
- School age programs

“Helping Emergency Managers, Health Departments, funders, providers, Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD) groups, and others better understand the field of early care and education can improve support in future disasters. This will be helpful as we continue to work toward sustained partnerships that support this type of work.”

- CCR&R staff

Four types of partnerships surfaced for all CCR&Rs:

-  community organizations,
-  emergency managers,
-  public health, and
-  disabilities-focused organizations.

Each CCR&R had remarkable success in helping local emergency management better understand the local child care provider landscape, the needs of children in disasters as well as the assets that their CCR&R can provide to emergency management, before, during, and after disasters.

Relationship Building Examples from Participating CCR&Rs

Some participating CCR&Rs:

- Conducted a disaster scenario tabletop exercise within the community. These coordinated community drills helped identify strengths and weaknesses that need to be addressed, including those impacting child care.
- Recruited child care programs and trained them to stand up child care during emergency situations.
- Thought ‘out of the box’ and established partnerships in areas they had not previously worked before but might be helpful to child care systems in an emergency, such as local and statewide VOAD (Voluntary Agencies Active in Disasters) groups.
- Created presentations about child care emergency preparedness and shared them with emergency managers, community foundations, and state early childhood boards to raise awareness about the importance and needs.



“Many doors are now wide open for us to have a seat at the table. We are participating everywhere we can to represent child care and the providers.”

- CCR&R staff



To support their efforts to be prepared, CCAoA created a [Disaster Ready CCR&R Toolkit](#). The toolkit helps CCR&Rs look at their own preparedness and ultimately create a business continuity plan for their organization. CCR&R staff often consider the needs of the child care providers, families, and communities they serve ahead of their own. This toolkit encourages them to make sure they are prepared so they can quickly resume vital services.

As part of this process, CCAoA identified eight elements of a disaster ready CCR&R.

1. A staff person designated to serve as a Disaster Ready CCR&R Champion
2. Sustained, long-term agency focus on disaster readiness
3. A business continuity plan in place
4. Emergency supply kits available in multiple locations
5. A written emergency plan in place to provide guidance on short-term emergency procedures
6. Emphasis on personal preparedness for CCR&R staff
7. Steps in place to support CCR&R staff mental health needs
8. Focus on collaboration and partnerships to support disaster preparedness work and enhance community resilience

Disaster Ready CCR&Rs Examples

- One CCR&R provided staff with emergency preparedness training and encouraged them to create their own individual/family emergency plan.
- CCR&R staff across a state worked together collaboratively to increase their preparation.

“We now have a core committee who will move forward to address the gaps we have identified as an agency. We’ll keep moving forward to better support child care providers in disasters.”

- CCR&R staff

“Emergency preparedness in the framing of a pandemic took on whole new proportions. While most emergency preparedness deals with singular events that, for the most part, have short lifespans, a pandemic is enduring. We have been and are learning so much about how the whole community around child care must be prepared. The pandemic provided people with an impetus to prepare. It has also revealed how truly vulnerable the most marginalized populations are when emergencies/disasters occur.”

- CCR&R staff



This project started before the COVID-19 pandemic and as expected, it was impacted by it in many ways. *The relationships in place before the pandemic allowed for a faster response when connections were already established.*

Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery and COVID-19 Examples from Participating CCR&Rs

Some participating CCR&Rs:

- Leveraged established partnerships to develop plans for temporary child care for essential workers.
- Provided technical assistance on how to make changes to emergency procedures, including lock down and shelter-in-place, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Took a lead role in advocating for child care businesses and families in the initial phases of the pandemic and subsequent stay at home order, establishing child care subcommittee to ensure the needs of young children were met in light of public-school closures.
- Coordinated with partners across the state to lift child care needs all the way to the Governor’s office, resulting in the historic allocation of 30 million dollars of COVID-19 relief funds to directly support child care and out of school time care.
- Provided emotional support to child care providers through phone consultations and offered door drop offs of important supplies, such as hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies throughout the pandemic.

Taking Action

There are many ways that CCR&Rs, child care stakeholders, emergency managers, first responders, and other partners can support child care providers with emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. Review the lessons learned and examples provided with stakeholders and think about what could be implemented in your area.

First steps may include:

- Determining the unique needs of child care programs and families in your community when it comes to emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.
- Making sure child care programs are supported with their emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.
- Establishing partnerships to support child care emergency preparedness, response, and recovery before a disaster strikes.
- Taking steps to ensure CCR&Rs can resume services as quickly as possible after a disaster by working on disaster readiness.



For more information, visit www.childcareprepare.org or contact Child Care Aware® of America's emergency preparedness, response, and recovery team at preparedness@usa.childcareaware.org.