

Early Learning Parent Cafes bring families together

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Parent Cafes provide space for Early Learning families to discuss parenting challenges and wins together.

For the 2021-22 program year, our [Early Learning Services \(ELS\)](#) received a grant from the [Illinois Head Start Association \(IHSA\)](#) to provide “Parent Cafes” for approximately 75 parents of children enrolled in Head Start/Early Head Start programs in Chicago and Suburban Cook County.

“Parent Cafes are physically and emotionally safe spaces where caregivers can talk about the victories and challenges of raising a family,” said Family Engagement Manager Paul Mast Hewitt.

Parent Cafes are discussions *for* parents and guardians that are also *led* by parents and guardians. Four parent leaders, as well as two ELS team members, participated in training provided by IHSA in the summer of 2021 and the Parent Cafes began November 2021.

One of our parents, Curtrice, whose four children attended our Gilchrist Marchman Child Development Center (GM), has facilitated 8 of the 9 cafes hosted so far.

“After the support that the staff at GM gave me in referring my oldest child for speech services through Early Intervention, which helped him tremendously, I wanted all of my children to attend GM,” she says. “When I attended a planning meeting for the Parent Cafes, I knew that I wanted to volunteer, but I didn’t realize that it would be in the facilitator role! It’s turned out to be a great experience.”

Curtrice has acted as the principle facilitator with other parents leading small group discussions. We had 72 parents in attendance so far, in addition to the parent leaders! All cafes have been delivered virtually. Due to their success, we are planning to recruit and train additional parent facilitators and start a new series of parent cafes in the fall of 2022.

To refer a child ages 0-5, or a pregnant woman/expectant family, to Gilchrist-Marchman or to any of our Head Start/Early Head Start programs (center based or home visiting) in Chicago or Suburban Cook County, please reach out to HeadStart@eastersealschicago.org.