



Valley of the Sun United Way and Helios Education Foundation
Ready Teachers Professional Development Partnership





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About Valley of the Sun United Way

Valley of the Sun United Way (VSUW) is the largest nonprofit funder of health and human services in Maricopa County. Since 1925, we've been building caring communities where individuals and families are successful, stable and secure. With 86 years of experience, we truly understand the challenges facing our neighborhoods. We partner with business and community leaders, volunteers, donors, nonprofit organizations and others to find innovative solutions to address short-term individual needs and create long-term community results.

Valley of the Sun United Way has three impact areas:

- Ensuring Children and Youth Succeed
- Ending Hunger and Homelessness
- and Increasing the Financial Stability of Individuals and Families

Ensuring Children Succeed

A child's success today is an investment in our community's future. That's why ensuring all children start school healthy and ready to succeed is one of our key objectives.

Valley of the Sun United Way is ensuring young children enter school ready to learn by:

- Improving the quality of child care centers through professional development;
- Providing comprehensive support and services to child care providers in high-need areas;
- Providing education and skill building opportunities to parents and caregivers; and,
- Creating broader awareness and increasing support for early childhood development.

About Helios Education Foundation

Helios Education Foundation is dedicated to creating opportunities for individuals in Arizona and Florida to succeed in postsecondary education. As a result, our commitment is to increasing student success across the entire education continuum, which spans from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education.

Improving the quality of early learning environments, enhancing teacher training and development, increasing curriculum rigor and relevance, and engaging parents and communities in student success are just a few of the many ways we strive to make the education system better and to help ensure students are better prepared for college, career and life.

Helios focuses its leadership, expertise and resources in three key impact areas:

Early Childhood Education

Ensuring children, birth to five, enter school prepared to learn and succeed.

Transition Years

Helping youth, grades 5-12, successfully transition between the various stages of education and graduate academically prepared for postsecondary education.

Postsecondary Scholarships

Providing young adults with access to and the support they need to successfully complete postsecondary education.

Valley of the Sun United Way and Helios Education Foundation

The ultimate goal of this powerful collaboration of community partners is to make a permanent endowment fund available for start-up, operational and continued programmatic fees, increasing the capacity for professional development and reducing barriers for





early childhood professionals in any setting. Efforts, like these, can considerably improve quality of care in any setting. Ready Teachers Professional Development Partnership, also known as Helios PDP, is a tremendous resource for formal and informal early childhood education professionals and practitioners.

Program Overview

Ready Teachers Professional Development Partnership is a program created by Valley of the Sun United Way in collaboration with Helios Education Foundation who funded the project through an endowment and provides ongoing input into the program. The program aims to increase the education level of center-based staff, facilitate a smooth pathway between levels of education attainment, develop a coordinated system of professional development, increase the availability of innovate and non-traditional systems for those seeking degrees, and evaluate the connection between quality improvement in child care and increased professional development.

The program launched, before Quality First, with the intention of informing the policies of a number of organizations, such as: First Things First, Department of Education, Arizona State University and affiliated partners.

The foundation research was culled from National Child Care Staffing Study (NCCSS), Honig and Hiralles (1998), North Carolina Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study, National Institute for Early Education Research and the Teacher Personal Challenges (Ackerman, 2004). The program was designed using best practice approaches to coaching and professional development.

Program Design

The education and experience of teachers and administrators, and the relationship developed between a teacher and child are the most important contributors

to quality early child development experiences in out of home child care settings. This study addresses teacher and administrator development.

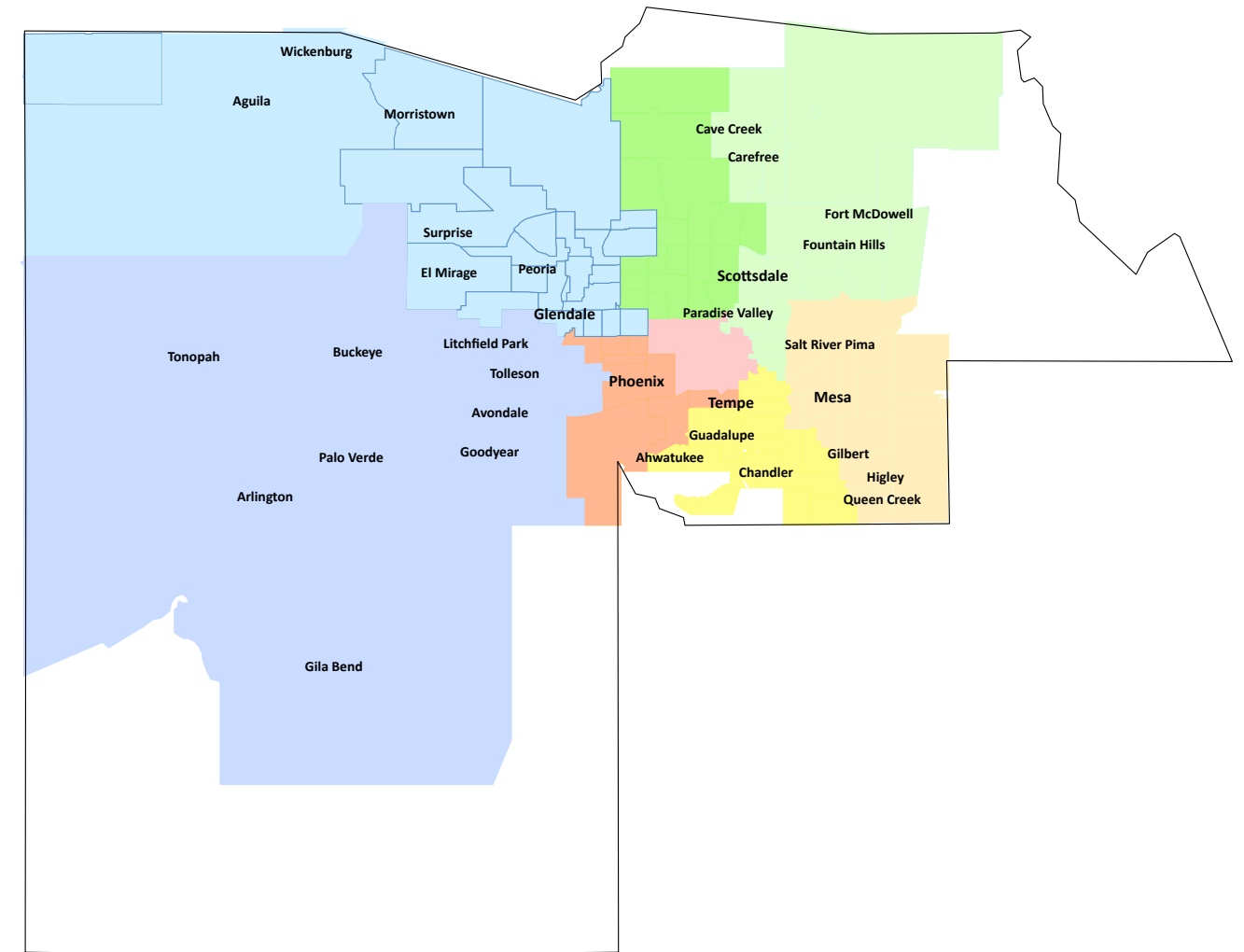
- *Director's Academy* - Directors from early childhood education centers participated in this professional cohort experience (Cohort One). The Academy relied on a project manager to facilitate partnerships with community colleges and community based organizations who:
 - Assisted in collecting academic status reports for each director; and,
 - Created individual professional development plans assisting each participant in addressing specific issues and barriers for gaining higher education.
- *Teachers/Staff* - Similarly, formal early childhood education teachers/staff worked in licensed care facilities as participants in a professional development cohort project (Cohort Two). Program participants:
 - Completed boot camp sessions to compile prior training and coursework for articulation into CDA National Direct Credential or college credits.
 - Received assistance from a coach who helped them develop professional development plans, including articulation and testing.

The programs were designed to support directors in their roles as leaders as they worked to mentor and empower their staff. For teachers, the goal was to begin thinking more strategically about their classroom, their role and influence on children.

Program Modifications

The program design evolved from its original form at implementation, based on learnings from the first Cohort. VSUW Success By Six sites served as ideal and preferred program locations (see map). Priority was given to child care programs that were not receiving

VSUW Professional Development Program Regions



services from other organizations to maintain clean data that could be attributed to the intervention.

In 2009, Valley of the Sun United Way began working with its first Cohort of seven facilities and maintained program enrollment for a full year. These full-day sites, full year programs served infants and toddlers, and were located in higher needs communities. Primary program recipients identified included one teacher from an infant classroom, one teacher from a toddler classroom, as well as the center director. Training opportunities were

available to all center staff. Each participant worked with an Education Coach, a staff member from Rio Salado College, to determine their college pathway, as well as a Professional Development Coach who conducted on-site coaching and provided technical assistance.

The VSUW Program Manager enrolled participants and conducted both pre- and post- assessments. Once the pre-assessments were completed, the Program Manager met with the Professional Development Coach to discuss the results. The Professional Development Coach

VSUW Success Story

Barbara: Early Childhood Learning Coach in Maricopa County

I help Valley of the Sun United Way provide coaching services to assist early childhood programs in the Valley. As a coach, I help teachers develop skills and strategies, and work with families and parents to ensure they have quality childcare. I work closely with school administrators to deliver services that support their organization's needs.

I work not only with the teachers but also the parents and administrators to help provide the support and resources to meet the needs to help prepare children to go to public schools ready to learn. The work is critical to ensuring that these children enter school ready to succeed and will ultimately need less services once they enter school and later on in life.

When Valley of the Sun United Way first came and started working with these individuals, one of our programs had been hit particularly hard by the economic downturn and the children had to do without the most basic supplies, like books and pencils. Our program helped.

Valley of the Sun United Way and Barb brought in the needed books, writing utensils, puzzles, blocks and other learning tools that the school had not been able to afford for some time.

Thankfully, we were able to provide these organizations and families with resources they were unable to provide for themselves. Most of the kids spend the entire day in the childcare center while their parents work full time jobs. Everything we can do to make that time a value to the children will benefit their future. And for me, it feels good because I know our efforts are greatly appreciated.

We can't invest enough in our young children, because they are our future.



then followed up with sites to begin the coaching process. Coaching consisted of developing a Quality Improvement Plan followed by regular visits and targeted training sessions. Both the plan and the content for coaching visits and trainings were determined jointly by the participant and Professional Development Coach. Participants consulted with the Rio Salado Education Coach to develop the professional development plan, determine the courses they would take and enroll in their courses.

Participants received a \$500 incentive for use in improving their classrooms or administrative functions. Each participant also received \$750 for course fees and materials. Later, participants received a cash incentive after VSUW received their mid-year and final evaluation, at \$150 and \$250 respectively, upon successful completion of their professional development plan.

Project Measures

- **ECERS** (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale) – assesses the quality of preschool group programs for two to five year olds overall and in seven specific domains.
- **ITERS** (Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale) – assesses the quality of programs for children from birth to two and a half years of age.
- **PAS** (Program Administration Scale) – measures the quality of administrative practices of childcare programs, both overall and in specific domains.

Cohort One: Quantitative Results

Twenty-one administrators participated during the first year of the program, from 46 classrooms, which impacted 610 children. Of the seven sites, two decided to participate for an additional year and thus transitioned into Cohort Two. Assessment results indicated the interventions had the greatest impact on teachers. Across groups, personal care routines were the least impacted by coaching. ECERS scores



increased at a higher percentage than ITERS scores. The most consistent positive impact varied according to the tools. Indicators showing the greatest gains included technology, program schedule, interactions, language and literacy. Across age groups, the most consistent positive impact surrounded activities, program structure, parents and staff.

Cohort Two

Six additional sites were enrolled for Cohort Two as of August 2011. One of the centers participating in our second year ended the program early due to staff turnover so the program is operating with seven actively enrolled facilities and 21 participants.

Program Modifications

Modifications were made between the first and second Cohorts due to program barriers, as well as feedback from participants and changing community dynamics. Across the board, participants requested more time with the Professional Development Coach. As a result, the Cohort Two participation time increased from 12 to 15 months. The Rio Salado College Educational Coaching relationship was not renewed because advisement based on college-specific degrees did not always yield the shortest term to graduation. During Cohort Two, the Professional Development Coach assumed oversight of advisement to help procure college transcripts and training certificates during enrollment. This new model takes advantage of the strong relationship between Professional Development Coach and participants. In addition, the Professional Development Coach served as an objective voice which allowed participants to select the type and location of professional development best suited to their needs. After modifying incentive amounts (by combining educational advisement funds to incentive funds) participants received increased monetary incentives.

Program Evaluation Conducted by the Virginia G. Piper Foundation

Dr. Wayne Parker, Director of Research and Evaluation at Virginia G. Piper Foundation, analyzed the assessment results using Cohen's D methodology. The process looked at changes in assessment scores between the pre-assessment and the post-assessment. It's likely that other factors, in addition to the coaching intervention, influenced the scores. Of particular note is the probable affect of the difficult economic conditions on center administrative practices, such as level of employee benefits. Other conditions that had probable impact on the scores include staff turnover and level of support from program owners.

Qualitative Findings

Findings across the Cohorts demonstrated a disconnect between the values of the system/institution and direct service providers. Staff working across agencies, universities and government value attaining higher education more than providers do. When asked "What constitutes a provider being qualified for a job?" providers typically reported mothering and former care-giving roles, such as with nieces and nephews; while agency personnel cited formal education. Within the field there appears to be a need for integration between mothering/nurturing skills that are indeed important to young children with formal training and structured curriculum that is also important for optimal development. Reflections from the Advisory Council indicated the current system gives caregivers messages that these nurturing skills are incorrect and unimportant.



When providers want to attend college, there are multiple personal barriers in their lives, including: computer access, transportation, child care for their own children and extended work hours. Financial access was the least reported barrier.

Program implementation coincided with one of the worst economic downturns since the great depression. The impacts on these programs were vast. Directors and staff struggled with daily operations and experienced consistent fears for their center's survival. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was important in the conceptualization of program needs, and at times highlighted the program's lack of focus on quality improvement during these difficult times when their day-to-day survival was in question. These challenges often were exacerbated by interpersonal conflicts – between staff, director, owner and pastor – caused by differing philosophies, points of view, and goals. As a result, Coaching often focused on immediate needs such as marketing, staff training on how to handle inquiries from perspective parents, and curb appeal.

Cohort One and Two emphasize that within the educational community there are vastly different views of what “coaching” is and what it entails. Directors wanted the coach to reinforce with teachers what the director believed they needed to do and were not doing correctly. With greater awareness of Quality First and the Rating System, Cohort Two highlighted a change in directors' focus on the tools. In Cohort One, there was little focus on the tools from participants. However, in Cohort Two, visits often included reviewing indicators and trainings about the specific meaning and nuances of the tool. Teachers believed that a coach was someone who came into their classroom, observed, and then told them what to do. Often, the first several weeks of the Coaching process involved shifting participants' views to view coaching as

a more organic, relationship-driven process where participant and coach were co-creators in the process.

Similarly, newly hired coaches often struggle with their new role as a coach. Some bring into their work notions about coaching that do not fully encompass the breadth of the work. It is critical for coach training entities to highlight the parallel paths of coaches and participants – awareness of these commonalities will enable coaches to demonstrate greater empathy and ultimately enable them to be more effective.

Program staff and advisory council members learned a great deal about the challenges of navigating the higher education system and gained a deeper understanding of the challenges early childhood teachers face in pursuing higher education. College registration and financial aid processes contributed new barriers. On multiple occasions, student registration was delayed due to course payments processed incorrectly, inconsistent college staff (with different processes) gave misleading information or mishandled paperwork, customer service was poor, and incorrect record-keeping. Program staff encountered additional barriers when trying to access transcripts for participants who needed assistance determining what courses they had taken and would need to take to complete a degree.

Advisement assistance varied based on the program and requirements of the specific institution's degree program. Each college in the Maricopa Community College system has different early childhood degree requirements, so students may not receive adequate advice to help determine the most efficient path to obtaining a degree with all the options available in Maricopa County. For example, a student may only need one class to complete a degree at one institution but at another institution may be advised to enroll in six additional classes. Often





participant schedules and family obligations precluded them from seeking advisement from multiple institutions before enrolling so they continued on tracks that did not ensure the fastest way to degree completion. To date, individual colleges in the Maricopa Community College system have individualized curriculum and requirements for obtaining an early childhood degree and these degrees are not articulated across campuses. Early childhood teachers are often not aware that the requirements at one institution may be different for another and thus waste time, energy and money accumulating credits while not obtaining a degree. Better coordination between Community Colleges and standardized articulation agreements with the Arizona University system would make a big difference in the personal and professional lives of participants.

Program staff are working to further process the messages agencies and institutions have historically given to teachers. Feedback from the Advisory Council suggests that, the Early Childhood Education system has worked to validate itself against the K-12 system and in the process have negated the care-giving components the field was built upon that many feel is paramount. While system-building is happening in Arizona and within Maricopa County at a fast rate, system and institutional staff should review and revise undermining messaging that is conveyed to an already disenfranchised and under-respected workforce.

Considerations for Valley of the Sun United Way

VSUW is at a point of change regarding how it allocates professional development funding. At the present time Professional Development is identified as an independent strategy. However, Professional Development is clearly a component of quality child care. There is discussion about combining professional development and quality

child care objectives with the expectation that professional development is a part of any quality efforts. Staff are also involved in evaluating the balance of funding for formal child care versus informal child care. Despite the fact that more than half of all children in the state receive care in informal settings, relatively few organizational dollars support the informal system of care. At this time, VSUW is exploring other options for enhancing informal caregiver support.

VSUW is also considering how best to promote system-wide changes based on the information learned from the VSUW and Helios Professional Development Partnership. Staff are considering the most effective way to bring this information to the industry to change existing professional development projects. Questions exist about how to get teachers to participate in professional development projects in a more dignified way. Reflections from the Advisory Council meeting indicated that within the field, counterintuitive rationales influence program design and implementation. Further alignment is needed to match practice with intuition. Upon Cohort Two completion, funding may be redirected into efforts more closely aligned with family friend and neighbor care as well as systems-building based on the gaps and barriers highlighted in this project.

Recommendations for Existing Programs and Systems

Learnings from the past two years indicate gaps in sites being selected for Quality Improvement efforts. Sites that are part-day, part-year, have been on the waiting list for years. Many of these sites want to improve their quality and are seeking support. Results from program outreach efforts during Cohort year two, indicate there was an unmet need and demand for services in these programs. These programs, while not enrolled in the statewide rating system,



have expressed a desire to receive coaching in order to better prepare them for the intensity of Quality First and the future rating. Ongoing consideration should be given to balancing the inclination to “teach to the test” with attention focused on true change in the learning culture of programs. The importance of individualizing coaching services based on program needs has been highlighted throughout the program. The challenge of larger quality improvement programs depends on balancing program consistency with the organic nature of quality coaching; where intensity and services are based on the unique needs of the individual program.

Additional considerations surround the term “incentive” used for purchasing quality materials, performance bonuses for management and personal awards to teachers. Further definition and refinement of terms would clarify the purpose and target of this funding. Advisory council members expressed community-wide confusion about the term “incentive” and how the funds could be used. By definition, an incentive is something that motivates or encourages someone to do something. Confusion lies in the fact that this term is being used for center, participant, cash and restricted awards interchangeably.

Both practitioner groups report that through the process of reflection and change they often think “if not what I have been doing, then what I am supposed to do.” These new thoughts can be very challenging to participants’ views of themselves professionally. Attention should to be paid to highlight practices that provide an appropriate replacement to previously held teaching behaviors, activities and beliefs.

There were also themes about “What system are we building?” This critical question reflects the Advisory Council’s concern that we do not yet have a clear roadmap for our early childhood system, and that our intentions

and messaging are not always consistent or clear to policy makers or those who care for our children. While the efforts of First Things First undeniably improve the system of care for young children, Arizona has yet to define a comprehensive system that is collaborative, builds on the strengths of all of involved in early childhood and holds all accountable for improved outcomes. Despite these opportunities, agencies and providers move ahead due to their commitment to children and their communities.

Conclusion

VSUW enjoyed delivering this project. Many thanks are due to the members of the Advisory Council who volunteered their time to discuss the project and help glean the critical learnings and recommendations mentioned.

We extend our true appreciation to Barbara Milner, our extraordinary coach who has, with unwavering honesty, offered a window to the successes and challenges of supporting quality improvement in child care programs. Findings from this project will inform our discussion with our partners as we further align our strategies to improve school readiness for our most vulnerable children.

Appendix

Evaluation Conducted Using Cohen's D

The scale:

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| + .80 or higher | Large positive impact |
| + .50 to + .79 | Moderate positive impact |
| + .20 to + .49 | Small positive impact |
| - .19 to + .19 | No real impact |
| - .20 to - .49 | Small negative impact |
| - .50 to - .79 | Moderate negative impact |
| - .80 or less | Large negative impact |

Assessment Results

| Program Administration Scale Results | Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale Results | Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Results |
|---|--|---|
| Moderate negative impact Center operations (d=-.64) | Moderate negative impact Personal care (d=-.56) | |
| Small negative impact Family partnerships (d=-.33) Personnel cost & allocation (d=-.23) | Small negative impact Interaction (d=-.35) | |
| No real impact Staff qualifications (d=-.10) Program planning and evaluation (d=+.04) | No real impact Language-reasoning (d=+.05) Space and furnishings (d=+.18) | No real impact Personal care (d=-.12) |
| Small positive impact Fiscal management (d=+.30) Human resources development (d=+.34) | Small positive impact Program structure (d=+.22) | Small positive impact Parents and staff (d=+.41) |
| Moderate positive impact Marketing & public relations (d=+.57) Child assessment (d=+.62) | Moderate positive impact Activities (d=+.75) | Moderate positive impact Activities (d=+.74) |
| Large positive impact Technology (d=+1.11) | Large positive impact Parents and staff (d=+1.63) | Large positive impact Interaction (d=+.94) Language-reasoning (d=+.99) Space and furnishings (d=+1.05) Program structure (d=+1.51) |

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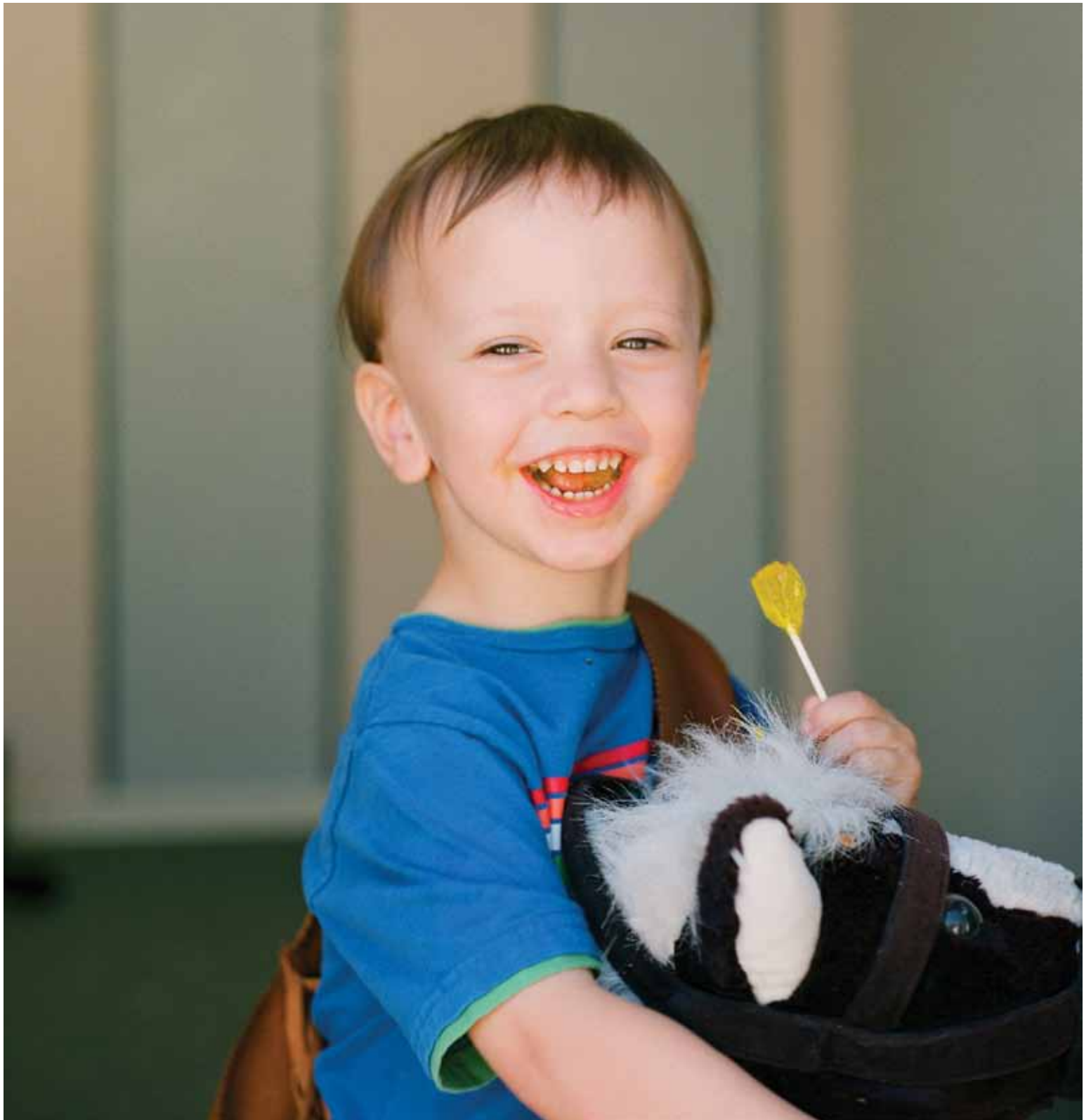
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