



ED Corner

Updates from Daryl Lucke, Executive Director

Dear Staff,

I would like to take a moment to thank all the staff who have generously offered to fill in for staff who are absent due to illness. As you are well aware, there is a lot of illnesses going around and we appreciate the flexibility and willingness of staff to pitch in to keep our centers open.

In this issue, you will read about the winning submission for our New Year Challenge. We received six submissions, each offering unique and thoughtful ways to enhance our workplace. The Administrative Team carefully reviewed and discussed each idea in detail, considering the required qualifications. Thank you to all who spent time thinking of ways to benefit the agency.

I hope many of you will take advantage of the free financial advice benefit that is offered as part of our retirement plan partnership with Fort Pitt Financial. No matter your financial circumstance, it is never too early or too late to benefit from professional financial advice. Reach out to reserve our 1:1 meeting.

Even though we are in the midst of winter, registration for Summer Fun begins on Feb. 18th. We look forward to your creativity to make it another successful summer. We are reviewing your feedback from the survey from last summer to tweak us from great to even greater- top of the list is more substantial snacks!!!

With appreciation for all you do,

Daryl

Executive Director



2025 New Year Challenge Winner!

We are excited to announce the winner of this year's Innovation Challenge: **Karlie Aschenbrenner** with her idea titled "**NEW Center Director Observation Week**"!

Karlie's proposal offers an innovative solution to help newly hired Center Directors better understand their roles before managing their own center. By providing new hires the opportunity to observe operations across multiple center sites, they can learn what a typical day entails, ask questions, and start building relationships with their future colleagues. This hands-on approach will help new Center Directors determine if the position is right for them and ensure they're fully prepared for the challenges ahead.

The idea aims to improve efficiency by allowing new Center Director hires to quickly gauge their fit for the role, reduce the risk of early turnover, and foster a sense of teamwork through regular interactions with staff across different centers. It also encourages better communication and support, benefiting not only the new directors but the entire staff, children, and families.

We received six submissions, each offering unique and thoughtful ways to enhance our workplace. The Administrative Team carefully reviewed and discussed each idea in detail, considering the following qualifications:

- 1.The idea must benefit the entire agency.
- 2.It must be implementable for under \$1,000.
- 3.It must be feasible given our agency's available resources.

Congratulations to Karlie!



February/March Birthdays

Please wish a Happy Birthday to:

Mary Dudas, Markham 2/17
Adriana Fawcett, Lincoln 2/17
Helen Nelson, Lincoln 2/26
Carole Salvato, Lincoln 2/29
Audrey Platx, Hoover 3/21
Maryn Fabean, Jefferson 3/16

February/March Pay Dates

2/14 pay is for hours worked 1/20-2/2
2/28 pay is for hours worked 2/3-2/16
3/14 pay is for hours worked 2/17-3/2
3/31 pay is for hours worked 3/3-3/16



Benefit Spotlight

Free Financial Guidance – No Matter Your Income Level

We understand that financial planning can feel overwhelming—especially if you're living paycheck to paycheck or think you don't earn enough to save for retirement. But here's the truth: **no matter how much you make, a solid financial strategy can help you make the most of every dollar and build a more secure future.**

That's why MLEDP is offering all employees the chance to meet with a **professional financial advisor—completely free of charge.** This is not just for those who are already saving—it's for anyone who:

- ✓ Worries about making ends meet and doesn't think saving is possible
- ✓ Wants to learn how even small contributions can add up over time
- ✓ Needs guidance on managing debt while planning for the future
- ✓ Has questions about maximizing employer benefits and tax-saving options

Even if you're struggling financially right now, meeting with an advisor can help you find new ways to **reduce stress, stretch your paycheck further, and build financial security—without drastic changes.**

These confidential, one-on-one sessions are designed to help you **take control of your money, no matter your starting point.** Small steps today can lead to big results down the road!

Appointments are available on 2/24 from 9:30am to 12 pm. Just contact Daryl to schedule a 20 minute, one on one meeting with a financial advisor.

Your future self will thank you for taking this first step!



Behavior Corner

Equipping Children to Make Good Choices

MLEDP is known for giving children choices. It's so important as they continue to develop social skills and transition from the school day with few choices. Children however need the security of some parameters to be confident to venture into the unknown without harm – physically and emotionally. Stating options of 2-3 choices helps children to make an engaging choice and prevents chaos. Here are some suggestions to build social skills for those children experiencing difficulty joining a group activity (wanting to do their own thing instead) or having trouble accepting loss or disappointment when they do participate.

Confidence: Change the vision from, I can't to I can. I am capable. Ask, what does it look like when practicing? Answer this, "Last time I ..., This time I ..., Next time I will...."

Control: Create space or time between stimulus and response... foster patience (can wait). Delay gratification. Help the child to take ownership to fix a problem.

Coping: See a difference between need and want. It's not a crisis if I don't have it. I can try again. Create a toolbox for kids to be their best resource, such as: draw a picture, read a book,

color, play with clay, run in place, take deep breaths, talk to someone. Help children to develop an internal ability to see ups and downs with a positive outlook.

Foster a good sense of humor and friendly connections. Tell jokes and laugh together. A positive mindset is a good foundation to learn and do.



Reminders

The [staff only](#) section of the MLEDP website can be a great resource to you. The password is MLStaff1.

Programming Resources

[Activity lists](#) feature successful planning sheets for activities to help you plan for programming at your centers. These are activities chosen by Center Directors and are available to you to print and use.

Training and Clearance Tracking

Our [Staff Tracking Sheet](#) is updated frequently and is always available for you to check due dates for your clearances, health assessment, CPR and mandated reporter training. As you know, these must be updated following DHS requirements. This tool is a great way to keep track in addition to reminders that we send out.