



WINTER

UNITED WAY
Central Missouri

2025/2026

EARLY CHILDHOOD UPDATE



WELCOME TO 2026!

Brrrr! It may be chilly outside, but things are heating up for the Early Childhood Program at United Way of Central Missouri. We're rolling out fresh trainings, Kid Spark STEM lessons, and the familiar supports you've come to expect from United Way!

If you have ideas, questions or feedback, we'd love to hear from you! We would love to partner with you!

PROVIDERS MEETING

Mark your calendars for our next Providers Meeting. Join fellow providers to share ideas to support a strong early learning community!

What: ECE Providers Meeting

When: January 22nd, 2026 at Noon

Where: UW of Central Missouri

We learn, share, and grow together.
All providers are welcome.

COMING SOON

January

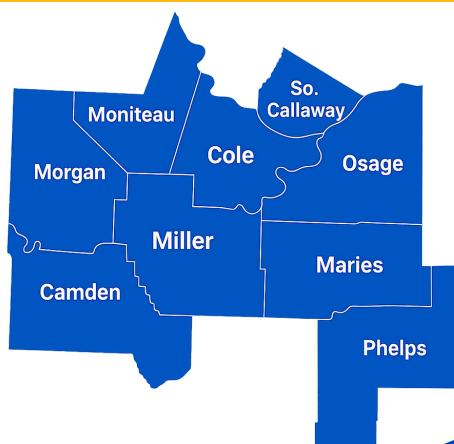
- January 14 - MO Early Childhood Advisory Council Live Stream - 1:00 pm
- January 21 - South Central Community Leader Zoom Meeting
- January 22 - Early Learning Provider Meeting - Noon
- January 26 - Super Saturday Training - 9:30 am - 3:30 pm MO River Regional Library - (more info. on page 3)

February

- February 4 - UW Unmet Needs Meeting - 8:30 am - UW Office
- February 12 - ECE Training - 4:15 pm*
- February 16 - ECE Training - 8:30 am*
- February 18 - South Central Community Leaders Zoom - 9:00 am
- February 21 - ECE Training - 8:30 am*

*More information on topics and locations of February trainings will be emailed and posted at the end of January.

UWC EMO SERVICE AREA



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



Recently, SSM Health Medical Group welcomed Dr. Aaron McLaughlin. Below is a note from Dr. McLaughlin that may be helpful for families you serve who have children with special needs.

Dear Day Care Directors,

As a partner in caring for young children, I want to introduce myself. I recently moved back to my home state and am getting settled in Mid-Missouri with SSM Health Medical Group Pediatrics, 3348 American Avenue in Jefferson City. In addition to general pediatrics, my practice focuses on caring for children with autism and child neurology issues such as headache disorders, genetic and developmental delays and weakness or numbness.

Here is a little about me...

I completed my undergraduate degree at Washington University in St. Louis earning a B.S. in biomedical engineering. My medical degree is from the University of Missouri, and I completed a pediatrics residency at SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital in St. Louis. Due to my strong interest in caring for children with autism and neurological conditions, I completed a fellowship in neurodevelopmental disabilities at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. Prior to coming to Mid-Missouri, I was Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics – Division of Developmental Medicine at Indiana University (2022 – 2025). (cont. next column)

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT CONT.

I am board certified in pediatrics and child neurology, with extensive experience in caring for children with autism.

I am passionate about supporting families through comprehensive care, early intervention and a multidisciplinary approach.

Please accept my heartfelt gratitude for your compassionate care of the children in our area. I would consider it a great honor to care for any children you refer to me.

Sincerely,

Aaron McLaughlin, M.D.



Aaron McLaughlin, M.D.
SSM Health Medical Group Pediatrics
3348 American Ave. JC, MO
573-761-7210

"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."
–Maya Angelou

KID SPARK STEM LESSONS



STEM Discovery Days **FREE!**

Kid Spark Early Inventors Labs

Lessons Start January 2026

Got questions? Want to sign up?
Call us at : 573-636-4100
Email at: kurt.hafley@unitedwaycemo.org

Hitachi Energy **United Way**

Kid Spark Info

QR Code

The poster features a purple background with two children playing with building blocks. A large gear icon is in the top left corner. A yellow speech bubble at the top right says "FREE!". A large "STEM Discovery Days" title is in the center. Below the title, a white box contains the "Kid Spark Early Inventors Labs" text. At the bottom, there are logos for Hitachi Energy and United Way, along with contact information and a QR code.

With generous support from **Hitachi Energy**, United Way's Early Childhood Initiative is able to provide early learning STEM lessons using the Kid Spark STEM Early Inventors Labs. The labs offer playful, hands-on activities for children ages 3 and up, with lessons lasting about 30 minutes. Kids explore building techniques, practice fine motor skills, and grow their teamwork and problem-solving abilities. Reach out to United Way of Central Missouri if you'd like to schedule these free lessons or need more details.



Use the QR code or link below to learn more about Kid Spark!

<https://kidsparkeducation.org/early-childhood-stem-literacy-program>

SUPER SATURDAY TRAINING

Do you want to earn 6 MOPD hours for FREE? If so, check out this informative training opportunity coming soon to Jefferson City!

Training Topics Include:

- Improving Your Program Through Reflection and Observation
- Building a Culture of Collaboration and Teamwork
- Elevating Parent Engagement

Date: January 24th, 2026

Time: 9:30 am - 3:30 pm

Where: Missouri River Regional Library

Got questions? Call or email today.

573-864-7467

rosemary.feraldi@thecommunitypartnership.org



Scan or call to register

MOST SAVINGS PLAN INFO



Start saving early!

With MOST 529, it's easier to help you reach your education savings goals. MOST—Missouri's 529 Education Plan is an affordable way to save for education expenses.

Join us for an informational session to learn more!

Date: Several - Choose one that works for you!
Time: 11:00 AM or 5:30 PM
Register: tinyurl.com/MOST529Webinar

• Enroll in just 10 minutes.
• Start saving early with any amount.
• Keep more of what you save with low-cost investments.

Questions? Contact us at MOST529Team@unitedwaycemo.org

QR Code

The graphic features a green background with a child playing with bubbles. A large green box on the left says "Start saving early!". A blue box below it explains the plan. A red box on the right encourages joining an informational session. A yellow box at the bottom lists the date, time, and register information. A QR code is at the bottom right.

Kurt Hafley - Early Childhood Program Director
573-636-4100
kurt.hafley@unitedwaycemo.org