Buncombe Partnership for Children
a partner in the Smart Start network

BILTMORE®

Creating an Oasis in the Child Care Desert

Infant-Toddler Expansion Grant Project

The Infant-Toddler Expansion Grant project began in 2023, when The Biltmore Company approached Buncombe Partnership for Children to explore a joint project to support our community's child care system. Buncombe County is considered a child care desert due to the scarcity of infant and toddler slots. We decided to partner to offer providers flexible grant funding to create **new slots** for children ages 0 - 2.

Project Funding

Biltmore offered $50,000 in yearly funding for 3 years, with $45,000 going directly to grants and $5,000 for BPFC staff salaries to administer the program. An important element of these grants is that they can be used as providers see fit to cover a variety of costs to upfit a new space, update or expand an existing classroom space to accommodate infants and/or toddlers. Examples include:

- Materials, furnishings and equipment for classrooms and playgrounds
- Additional sinks, plumbing updates, HVAC updates, and direct exits to outdoors to meet infant- and toddler-specific state licensing requirements
- Hiring bonuses, staff salaries, or discounted child care tuition for educators' children



Toddlers at Evolve Early Learning

The HCA Healthcare Foundation contributed $25,000 in late 2024 to offer grants to more providers. In the summer of 2025, BPFC received a $20,000 donation to this initiative.

Application & Selection Process

Eligibility - child care centers and family child care homes must meet the following criteria:

- Licensed by the DCDEE to provide child care in Buncombe County. Proposed additional child care slots must be in Buncombe County.
- Must hold a 4- or 5-star rated license with the DCDEE or show intent and ability to achieve a 4- or 5-star rating within 6 months of the application date.

Applications - application cycles are open four times a year. A selection committee composed of two BPFC staff members, one parent with young children, and a child care provider chooses grant recipients.

Priority is given to programs that demonstrate ability and readiness to increase DCDEE licensed full-time child care slots for infants (ages 6 weeks – 12 months), followed by slots for 1-year-old toddlers. In response to the highest child care needs in our community, priorities for funding will include a focus on slots for the youngest age groups, the timeline from award to slot availability, geographic location, and plans for staffing.



Infants at Sprouts Early Learning Academy

Project Results

Year 1 Grants – Total Awarded $45,000, 60 slots created

- Sprouts Early Learning Academy (S. Asheville/Arden) – 34 slots created through a grant of $20,000.
- Evolve (W. Asheville) – 14 slots created through a grant of $7,000.
- East Asheville Academy – 12 slots created through a grant of $18,000.

Year 2 Grants – grant cycles were delayed by 9 months by Hurricane Helene and the associated recovery for child care providers. Several applicants revised and deferred their applications. Two programs were awarded grants for the future *creation of 27 slots*. One program delayed implementation until early 2026 to complete HVAC work, and one program is working on final plans with the DCDEE, Fire, & Sanitation agencies before announcing expansion publicly.

Year 3 Grants - Eight applications were received in the first grant cycle (application deadline of 10/15/25) and are under review by the committee with awards announced in December 2025.