https://www.greenevillesun.com/news/local_news/childrens-center-kept-helping-working-families/article_75b22e45-2290-507e-b0eb-c72f659cac46.html

Children's Center Kept Helping Working Families

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Smiling faces keep up morale for the staff at The Children's Center, a United Way-supported program that provides childcare for families who might otherwise have none.

Photo courtesy of The Children's Center

When the pandemic came along early in 2020, it created problems for everyone. This was especially true during the most stringent lock-down periods that led to the restructuring of how jobs were done, how education was delivered, how government functioned, and how churches, clubs and other organizations met.

For some working families with young children and parental jobs that could not be done remotely, such as working in manufacturing, construction, and so on, the problems were severe.

For The Children's Center, one of the Early Childhood ministries of Greeneville's Holston United Methodist Home for Children, tough decisions had to be made. This particular United Way-supported service ministry's mission is to provide quality, affordable childcare for children of working parents, and especially for children from low-income and single-parent families.

If the Children's Center had closed its doors at 119 Fairgrounds Circle, many working parents would have had no way to take care of their young children during the work day, and thus would have been forced to sacrifice jobs they depended upon. This was not a tolerable option.

So the Children's Center dug in their heels, doubled down on sanitation and masking and stringent precautions to maintain safety, kept themselves in compliance with mandates, and never closed down.

Through all the pandemic, the Children's Center has been able to keep going – a feat not all businesses and enterprises could not achieve. The result was that working parents who depend on the Children's Center for child care were able to keep going, too.

Never, perhaps, has the ministry aspect of the Children's Center been in clearer focus than it was throughout 2020 and into 2021.

Holston Home as a whole has been part of the faith and service life of Greeneville and Greene County for many decades, and the Children's Center is one part of the Holston Home ministry that came about through a desire to find new and needed avenues of service.

As Holston Home itself tells it on its website: “In 1985, Holston Home began looking beyond its campus to help communities care for their children. We were concerned about the need for quality, affordable childcare for children of working parents and especially for children from low-income and single-parent families.”

A direct outcome of that desire to look “beyond the campus” was the Children’s Center. Though the Children’s Center has been around long enough now to be a familiar and established part of the Greeneville community and landscape, when compared to the long tenure of its parent institution, the center is a relatively new branch of a tree with deep historical roots.

Holston United Methodist Home for Children was founded in 1895 when Mrs. E.E. Wiley, a widow, took in her first homeless child. Since that humble beginning, Holston Home has helped more than 8,000 children.

Holston Home declares itself “proudly affiliated with the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church, an area that covers all of East Tennessee, the westernmost 17 counties in Virginia, and a little bit of territory in North Georgia. In that area, more than 873 United Methodist Churches make up the Holston Conference.”

With service locations in Greeneville, Johnson City, Knoxville and Chattanooga, and a Family Service Center in Bristol, Holston Home is in the ministry of helping children. The Children’s Center carries out its part of that mission by helping parents who are striving to give their children a good raising, but require child care so they can carry out their jobs.

Through United Way support, the Children’s Center can offer scholarships to help parents pay for the fees, which are on an income-based sliding scale.

Says Children's Center Program Director Kathy Meredith: "United Way funding helps us continue to provide quality, affordable childcare services in our community. We focus a lot on helping low income families who otherwise could not afford childcare. Daily programs at both centers include learning activities, one hot meal and two snacks. We are so grateful for the United Way's support!"

Both of Holston Home's childcare centers have been awarded a Three Star Rating (the top rating) on the Tennessee quality rating system.

A simple PDF application is available at www.holstonhome.org/earlychildhoodministries. Also on the website is an email contact link: www.holstonhome.org/emailcontactform.

Information about the Children's Center and its sister program, Small Miracles, also located in Greeneville, is available on the website.

The address of the Children's Center is: The Children's Center, 119 Fairgrounds Circle, Greeneville, TN 37745. Phone: 423-638-5589.

Support of the United Way, whether through workplace giving or individual donation, goes to help keep the Children's Center and many more programs and agencies, functioning for the good of the local community and its people.