United Way launched the Childcare Workers Appreciation Fund in January 2022 to honor childcare providers—the frontline workers who shifted, pivoted and persisted so that children could thrive and parents could continue to work through the COVID pandemic.

With the arrival of the Omicron variant last winter, childcare providers faced staffing shortages, protocol shifts, and an urgent need for new safety equipment, while parents struggled to balance jobs and caregiver responsibilities. These latest obstacles, following two years of severe health and economic challenges, added to the mounting stress that childcare providers shouldered, even as they continued to work long hours under incredible circumstances to deliver high-quality learning experiences for some of our most vulnerable residents.

To boost their morale and raise awareness of the crisis, we issued a call to action and donors responded: Together we raised nearly $110,000 for mini grants to support staff wellbeing at over 200 childcare centers across Massachusetts. We also secured 100,000+ surgical masks, 13,000 pairs of medical-grade gloves, 1,300+ bottles of hand sanitizer, 4,000 face shields, and disinfectant spray, benefitting dozens of providers in our region that serve over 10,500 children—primarily from low-income families, who bore the brunt of the pandemic.

“The early education sector is drowning. Each day is a struggle to keep classrooms open so children can thrive and parents can work,” said Lauren Cook, Chief Executive Officer of Ellis Early Learning. “To have the ability to do something nice for our incredible workforce is such a gift.”

Justin Pasquariello, Executive Director at East Boston Social Centers, said, “Several years ago, we were able to give all staff East Boston Social Centers sweatshirt-jackets, and people very proudly wear them. We have received significant positive feedback and gratitude. With these United Way funds, we are providing new jackets for all Social Centers staff—and we know these jackets will bring warmth and joy!”