The early education sector has been underfunded and under-resourced for some time, and access to high quality early education and care continues to prove challenging for families, while hindering economic growth. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened this crisis and had disparate impacts on communities of color.

Family childcare (FCC) educators, primarily women and immigrants, are an integral part of the early childcare ecosystem, and United Way sees FCC workers as a critical component to solving the childcare crisis throughout the Commonwealth. This year, ten new family childcare entrepreneurs successfully completed the FCC Business United Licensing Support program designed and delivered by United Way. The program is a six-month course that provides license training and support, coaching, and technical assistance funded through a grant from the City of Boston.

The program increases economic opportunity for childcare providers and the families they serve, as FCC providers gain tools to succeed long-term as both educators and owners of FCC businesses. In a matter of months, seven educators in this pilot group received their licenses from the Mass. Department of Early Education and Care and four graduates are already operating childcare businesses in their homes.

“I worked for 14 years as an assistant in a center, and today thanks to the Licensing Support Program, my dreams have come true, and I own my own business,” said family childcare educator Altagracia De Los Santos during a September graduation ceremony hosted by United Way at Project Hope in Roxbury.

“This program needs to continue so we can provide children and families with the childcare services they desperately need to become successful. I hope many others have the opportunity I had to make their dreams a reality,” said Keisha Marshall, who also earned her license and opened her own business with support from the program.