

**YWCA Central Massachusetts
Emergency Child Care
Spring 2020**

Parents across the state got dreaded news in March, when Governor Baker ordered all childcare centers to close to help reduce the spread of the virus. For parents who were considered essential during the pandemic and, therefore, had to work, the closing caused an immediate crisis. How could they work when they had no one to care for their children?

The YWCA Early Education and Care Center, which normally serves 137 children per day, was one of those that closed on March 19 in compliance with the Governor's order. Recognizing the tremendous need for childcare through the epidemic, the YWCA remained committed to being a resource to those most in need. The YWCA Early Education and Care Program applied to the state to be part of its special program to provide childcare for essential workers and began a collaboration with UMass Memorial Health Care to support their employees who needed child care during the state-wide shutdown.



On Monday, March 23, the YWCA Early Education and Care Center reopened as a part of a consortium of four Worcester area childcare centers to provide Exempt Emergency Child Care Programming.

To support this programming, Friendly House collaborated with the YWCA to provide breakfast, lunch and a snack for children each day. YWCA educators received training from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care

on health and safety requirements, safety protocols, social distancing, how to use personal protective equipment, and most importantly, how to make families and children comfortable during the COVID-19 emergency.

Since then, childcare at the YWCA has changed dramatically from our pre-COVID day-to-day operations. Now, when families enter the building for childcare, a staff member escorts them to the bathroom for handwashing for both parents and children. That staff member then takes each child's temperature and the parents complete a health screening questionnaire. When the children are cleared for entry to the center for the day, they are escorted to the classroom by a designated childcare administrator.



“It certainly was a challenge for us because it was all new. Parents thanked me continuously for being open and didn’t know what they would do if we hadn’t been available,” said Melissa Freeman, Childcare Director.

Mark was one of those parents. "The YWCA was invaluable to us during the initial shutdown. We were faced with options few as our daughter's daycare was closed and we had to quickly adjust our schedule to make accommodations. The YWCA made the intake smooth and painless, getting us ready to come to the center right away. Our daughter transitioned quite well and after daycares began to open again, we decided to stay with the YWCA. I work at the hospital and the YWCA is located close by, making it quite convenient. Additionally, the center was not at all crowded which was ideal during this era of social distancing. We look forward to our daughter spending more time at the YWCA."

Chloe Wiseman has been with the YWCA center since 2017. As an essential worker, she stayed with the center when it reopened for emergency care, and remains with the center now. “I owe my degree and my job to the YWCA. Without them, I could not continue to grow in my career and provide for my family,” she said.



These are just two families who benefited from the funding received from Worcester Together and the United Way of Central Massachusetts. According to Vanessa Martinez, Assistant Director of the YWCA, parents commented daily on how grateful they were that the YWCA opened for essential workers. “We were lifesavers to families!”