



A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE: WOMEN OF INFLUENCE SUMMIT RAISES MORE THAN \$170,000 FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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On March 6, more than 500 people gathered to support early childhood education and celebrate International Women's Day at United Way's fourth annual Women of Influence Summit, sponsored by [DTE Energy](#).

The event is hosted by United Way for Southeastern Michigan's [Women United group](#). This group of women supports our early childhood education work as part of our efforts to ensure children have the support they need to thrive.

The event raised more than \$170,000 to help fund [Child Development Associate \(CDA\) certifications](#) for child care providers, ensuring more families in our region have access to quality child care.

Many summit attendees wore white in honor of the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment, which protects and guarantees a women's constitutional right to vote. As they networked over coffee—sharing obstacles, experiences and successes—the sea of white could be seen just as easily as the power in the room was felt.



Sen. Debbie Stabenow and Local 4 news anchor Karen Drew took part in a fireside chat at United Way's Women of Influence Summit on March 6. They discussed women's rights and how to support children and families through policy and advocacy.

A STEP FORWARD

WDIV news anchor Karen Drew led an empowering fireside chat with Sen. Debbie Stabenow, the first woman from Michigan to be elected to the U.S. Senate.

Drew is a an anchor on [Local 4 News](#), as well as an investigative reporter with the Local 4 Defenders. She is also a wife, mother to two children and, like many women, she's a "Jill of all trades."

[Sen. Debbie Stabenow](#) is not only a history-maker, but a leader in the effort to ensure people have quality, affordable health care, including mental health care. Stabenow also leads the fight for making sure that high-quality early childhood education is available to all families.

The two women talked about the importance of mental health services and child nutrition programs. They also discussed equal pay for women and 100th anniversary of women's suffrage.

"We have made great strides. The 100th anniversary is a moment to celebrate and recommit ourselves," said Stabenow. "In the 2018 election, headlines didn't emphasize that the candidates were women. Women are being looked at as an individual for their policies and competencies, and that is a step forward."



Sonia Manzano, who played Maria on "Sesame Street" for more than three decades, speaks at the Women of Influence Summit on March 6

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN

Keynote speaker [Sonia Manzano](#), best known for her four decades playing the character Maria on "Sesame Street," spoke about the wonder, confidence, humor and innate resiliency of children, as well as the impact guidance and positive representation can have on their lives. In her television role, Manzano showed young children the power of being represented. Maria was one of the first Hispanic characters on national television.

"It's a noble and natural thing to want to help the young, because every generation on some level hopes and even assumes that the next one will be better," she said.

Manzano spoke about her humble beginnings and how a generous invitation from her fourth-grade teacher to see "West Side Story" made a positive impact on her life, setting her on the path to be a woman of influence.

"Women United, the United Way, all of us together can make a difference in the life of a preschooler or in the life of a young girl," Manzano said. I'm very confident of that."



Attendees at the Women of Influence Summit learn about the United Way's work to support families and children.

EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS

One of the biggest ways United Way supports children and families is through our support of child care providers.

The CDA program helps child care providers sharpen their skills, improve their businesses and provide better care for children. Earning a certification also empowers child care entrepreneurs by allowing them to care for more children and earn more money.

Earning and maintaining a CDA certification is no small feat. The program requires classroom and on-the-job training. Also, child care providers must renew their licenses every two years.

CDA certifications can cost an individual \$1,500 to \$3,000, which can be prohibitive for many child care workers. Through our partnership with [Leaps and Bounds Family Services](#), we're covering the cost of this training. As a result, more individuals can earn their certification, giving parents more options for quality child care.

Last year, we sponsored 88 child care providers. This year, we have 50 active participants who are on track to graduate, along with 19 renewals.

This year, our CDA program received the highest national accreditation possible. It's one of two programs in Michigan that is certified as CDA Gold.



Speakers at United Way's Women of Influence Summit included Sen. Debbie Stabenow and Mary Culler, president of the Ford Fund.

A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

Women United, through the Women of Influence Summit, has raised more than \$500,000 to support United Way's early childhood education work. For the past two years, the event has directly supported the CDA program.

It's an initiative our partner DTE Energy is proud to support through dollars raised and [volunteerism](#) with our CDA participants.

"We have no better partner across the state of Michigan than United Way in our shared mission to educate and lift up children," said Nancy Moody, vice president of Public Affairs at DTE. "We all know in order for kids to get a good education that really starts in the zero to five years and that is what Women United is focused on."

Dr. Darienne Hudson, CEO of United Way of Southeastern Michigan, empowered guests to impact our community with their time and donations.

"With our CDA participants, the next Sen. Stabenow is being nurtured at this time; the next Sonia Manzano is being nurtured; and the next Michelle Obama is building the foundation for the future," said Hudson.

"Together we can change the trajectory of a child's life. We can change what they're able to do with those talents, and by doing that we can change the world."

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