



THIS IS A FINE.  
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Childcare is  
**ESSENTIAL**

**CHILDCARE  
WILL BE  
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Pay  
early  
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**FIX  
CHILDCARE NOW!**

**PAY  
TEACHERS**  
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**WE R NOT OK**

preschool  
is  
important!

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New Haven Early Childhood Council

TAKE 400 KIDS

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: ALLYX SCHIAVONE '85

# A Champion for Children

Allyx Schiavone '85 doesn't take "no" for an answer — not if she knows there is a better answer. She has made it her mission — and profession — to take up the causes that are closest to her heart, and she's made it clear that she will not back down from a challenge.

"I've always been a fighter. That's been part of how I grew up," she said.

For example, when she was a middle school student at Foote in the '80s, there was no girls soccer team. If she wanted to play soccer, she had to try out for the boys team — and make the team, of course. For many teenage girls, that would be too intimidating. Not for Allyx. She made the team, and made an impact on the school at the same time.

"I think after that the next year, they started doing girls and boys soccer — which they should have been doing before that, but it's great to see an institution shift and make it work for the students," she said.

Today Allyx is an early childhood educator with more than 30 years of experience. She helped develop the Friends Center for Children (New Haven) and serves as its executive director. Friends Center is an early childhood care and education center for children as young as 3 months up to 5 years old. As the driving force behind its rapid growth and innovation, Allyx and her team collaborate across three educational facilities to ensure that the families they serve can thrive. Some of her initiatives at Friends Center include: the Emotional Wellbeing Program, the Free Teacher Housing Initiative, and the Teacher Leadership Program.

She is also a founder of New Haven Children's Ideal Learning District (NH ChILD), "a coalition of local and national early childhood proponents who have come together to create an ideal learning place-based pilot program ... to provide high-quality early care and education experiences for all 15,000 New Haven children ages zero to eight," according to its website.

Also a mother of two (her children Penn '17 and Josie '19 are also Foote alumni), it's safe to say that Allyx is an expert on early childhood development. Because of her experiences in the classroom and as a parent, she sees firsthand the disparities and deficiencies in the existing system. Part of the reason for this is that early childhood education is undervalued, she said.

"We have a completely upside-down view in our so-

ciety about the way brain development works. We make this push for higher education and high school and how critical that is, and really, the most critical time for brain development in humans is between the age of 0 and 5," she explained. "Ninety percent of our brain has developed by the age of five, 80% by three, so 0–3 is a critical time."

At the same time, government support for early childhood education is severely lacking. Without sufficient government funding, childcare remains too expensive for parents, and doesn't pay its educators a fair wage. For every dollar invested in the education for children ages 0–5, there is a 13% return per year.

"That's a really high rate of return for any investment, and we still continue to ignore it," she pointed out. "We don't see it as a public or social good. We need to start seeing early care and education in the same way we see the K through 12 system, and we need to provide it for the children in our communities."

The tragic reality of underfunding this facet of education is that the children are the ones who suffer. Yet it's not just about affordability and access for parents and children. It's also about supporting the educators who work in this space. Allyx pointed out that compensation for all educators is deficient, but particularly for this perceived "pink" profession. On average, early childcare providers/educators only make about \$29,000 a year.

"Early care education is looked at as a female profession, and as a result of that — and the fact that it's disproportionately black and brown women or women of color who are in this field — you have the intersectionality of sexism and racism on total display in this system," she argued. "You can't say you're pro-childcare, unless you're also pro-female or pro-family, pro-child, pro-racial-equity, pro-gender-equity."

It's one thing to notice a problem; it's an entirely different challenge to seek a solution. But remember, Allyx is a fighter. She has made it a priority to challenge the standards of equity in the early education sector. Allyx is also the co-chair of Childcare for Connecticut's Future coalition. Alongside legislators like Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro and other early education experts, Childcare for Connecticut's Future has helped pass legislation and bring awareness to the critical needs of (and requisite funding for) early childhood education programs.

## ALUMNI

When Connecticut's FY 2023–2024 budget report was initially released, the coalition was dismayed to see that there was no money allocated for early care and education. The group took their fight to the New Haven Green in March 2022, rallying for “a morning without childcare” to demonstrate what society would be like if parents and children had no access to childcare. It had an immediate impact, and legislators advocated for a revised budget that now allocated \$183 million for early care and education.

Then the FY 2024-25 Biennial Budget Report was released February 2023; the early care and education budget was slashed again. They rallied again.

“We continue to fight for what we know is best not just for children, but for the community and for the economy. You can't have a workforce without us,” she stated.

This year Congresswoman DeLauro invited Allyx to Washington, D.C., to attend the 2023 State of the Union address. Before the event, Allyx was asked to take part in a press conference to talk about the need for public investment in early care and education. She saw herself standing alongside Sen. Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, advocating for children, now with a national audience.

“[I was there with these] amazing champions of early care and education and of women and gender and racial equity. ... It's an electric thing to be a part of,” she remembered.

The problem, she said, isn't that the cause is unpop-

ular. In fact, it's one of the rare issues that sees support from both conservatives and liberals. The issue received standing ovations at both President Joe Biden's and Gov. Ned Lamont's State of the Union addresses. “What is then disappointing and remarkable is that the investment doesn't come,” she lamented.

Allyx is well aware that this is an issue that will need constant care and attention; she will need to keep fighting. The needs of society are ever-changing, and children will always need concerted care. But she's been preparing for a long time — even as far back as her time at Foote.

“For me, Foote is really part of who I am,” she stated. “I remember very distinctly the people, the place, the feelings that came out of my time there. They absolutely created a space for me to think about others, which is really what drove me to the work that I do.”

Her training also comes from the work she does alongside co-workers, peers, legislators, and other advocates. Allyx advised that anyone interested in effecting change needs to get involved — be it through advocacy, volunteering, donating, or all three. Taking care of one's community is another Foote value she cherishes.

“Being in a community where I was accepted for who I was at that time, and having teachers who really cared about my well-being is really how I made it through and got to a place where I am today,” she said. “I am forever grateful for the opportunity and the experience that I had and the basic education, which is just foundational for everything else.”



**Photos**

Page 44: Allyx Schiavone '85 at a rally in March; page 46: Allyx met President Joe Biden while attending this year's State of the Union (at the invitation of Rep. Rosa DeLauro); below: Allyx was the only girl on the soccer team in ninth grade; bottom: the eighth grade class in 1983-1984. She still has the signed sneakers from her Middle School days at Foote, along with her Mr. Perrine-signed certificate and varsity letter.

