

Partnership & Collective Impact

126 years of providing high quality early education

2023 IMPACT REPORT

earlyconnections℠ LEARNING CENTERS



A Letter from our President

Dear friends,

This past year marked my first full calendar year as the President and CEO of Early Connections Learning Centers, and I want to say, "Thank you." It is your support and partnership that made it possible for us to continue building upon our legacy and laying the foundation for our future.

For 126 years, our organization has worked to build and strengthen meaningful partnerships and relationships that directly impact the needs of children and families in our community. I believe that as people, we reflect those we choose to be around. Similarly, Early Connections is an excellent organization because we partner with excellent organizations and individuals to collectively remove barriers in the Pikes Peak Region to ensure ALL children receive the early care and education they need to be successful in life.

In 2023, we had remarkable success thanks to you! Below are just a few highlights:

- Universal Preschool was implemented to provide FREE preschool for all 4-year-olds, and we are a proud, high-quality provider.
- We were honored to receive an Award for Excellence from El Pomar Foundation, recognizing our long history of outstanding work and contributions to the families and children of El Paso County.
- Our Behavioral Health team was honored with the Colorado Pyramid Model Champion Award for our strong knowledge and commitment to implementation and expansion of the Pyramid Model (a social/emotional framework for working with young children).
- We reinstated our volunteer program after pandemic-related challenges and welcomed volunteers back in our centers in a variety of roles.
- We invested in new technologies to help increase efficiency and communication with families, staff, and donors.
- We continued to work towards bringing the Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education to life and expect exciting movement in 2024.

Because of your support and partnership, the above accomplishments were possible. From the bottom of my heart, thank you! Alongside you and our incredible community, we will continue to break down barriers ensuring all children have access to high quality early education.

With gratitude,

E Denson

Liz Denson, President & CEO

Our *mission*

To provide

high quality, comprehensive early care

and education for ALL children.



Our approach

At Early Connections we know that to serve a child holistically our approach must be comprehensive. We work to create a space that allows the student, teacher, and family to engage and connect. This partnership is critical to ensure each child reaches their full potential. At the core of each of our classrooms is our high-quality early care and education program grounded in a literacy-based curriculum. In addition to this, our nutrition program and behavioral health team play critical roles in the overall success and well-being of each child entering our doors. Through the programs and tools in place, your support, and strategic partnerships, we expect to see children succeeding and families flourishing!



Continuing Our Legacy

building our future

Early Connections Learning Centers was founded with the explicit mission to provide access to high quality, comprehensive early education, and care to children in Colorado Springs, focusing on families facing economic and health hardships. Over the course of our 126-year history, we have developed a multifaceted model that leverages strong, established relationships and partnerships across sectors to:

provide families access to affordable and high quality early education and care so they may work and/or continue their education,

cultivate experts in the field of early childhood education so we can build the highly skilled workforce needed to serve our mission, and

create a comprehensive program and curriculum that meets the holistic needs of our community.

Our mission-driven focus on providing children the critical foundations that support their long-term success presents opportunities for us to partner with other industry leaders that provide tools, resources, and specialized training that support our families and teachers in gaining economic mobility.





SCHOOL READINESS

91% **of Children Meeting or Exceeding Developmental Benchmarks**

Children are evaluated three times a year to help us measure the knowledge, skills, and behaviors in developmental domains that are most predictive of school readiness. During the 2022-2023 evaluation year, the overall average of children meeting or exceeding developmental benchmarks increased from 76% in Fall 2022 to 91% in Spring 2023.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY MEALS

99,084 **Meals Served**

According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, children attending full-time child care obtain up to 2/3 of daily nutrient needs while outside of the home. Early Connections takes pride in offering a nutritionally-sound breakfast and lunch, along with a snack each day.

Program highlights



BOOKS AT HOME

2,003 Books Distributed

To extend learning beyond the classroom, each child enrolled at Early Connections receives a new book EACH MONTH through our Books at Home program. This program helps families build a home library and emphasizes to parents the importance of reading to and with their child.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

30% of Children Cared for Received Support

30% of children served at Early Connections received special needs services (speech, occupational therapies, Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy, play therapy, etc.). This is a 10% increase from 2022 and an overall 22% increase since the onset of the pandemic. We are grateful for the continued investment in our Behavioral Health Program as it is critical to the success of the child, the family, and the teachers.

502 Children Cared For

STOCKINGS FOR KIDS

300 Kids Stockings

2023 marked the 28th annual Stockings for Kids program. Many families in our community struggle to make ends meet, and holiday gifts are often beyond their reach. Our Stockings for Kids program helps create a positive and memorable holiday by giving gifts to children and siblings of Early Connections Learning Centers. Hundreds of community donors and volunteers came together in support of our children and their families.

HOME NETWORK OF THE PIKES PEAK REGION

230 Children in Home Network

In 2023, we served 230 children and their families in addition to 20 small business owners through the Home Network. Family Child Care homes are one of the most prevalent child care arrangements in the United States, particularly for people of color and children from low-income families. Through our partnership, we can meet the needs of families and provide these traditionally female-owned businesses with quality improvement and professional development to ensure their success and the future of the children in their care.

Who We serve

We are committed to serving ALL families. We must understand the population we serve to meet the needs of the Colorado Springs Community.

64%

of the families we served were single parents or guardians.

28 families identified as homeless.

54 families were active-duty service members.





96% of the children in our care were provided support through tuition assistance. Among these children, **60%** receive state subsidy.

60% To be eligible for state subsidy, a family must have an income of ***less than $536 a week.***

68% of the families we serve qualified for free or reduced lunch.





Supporting our *growing city*

When our organization was founded in 1897, the population of Colorado Springs was nearly 30,000. Today, more than 480,000 people call this beautiful city home, and we continue to see unprecedented growth that puts Colorado Springs on a trajectory to be the largest city in the state of Colorado. Downtown is experiencing a multifamily residential surge, and we know a family's ability to participate in the economy is essential to our vitality. We know families need access to affordable and reliable child care to thrive. We also know how critical it is for children to access high quality early education as 90% of their brain develops before they start Kindergarten.

Investing in the children and families of today is an investment in our community, our city, and our shared future. Early Connections remains committed to expanding our capacity to help meet the growing needs of children and families in our city. Our Building Futures campaign is focused on closing the funding gap needed to see the new Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Childhood Education (ABT Center) come to fruition. The new ABT Center will dramatically expand the number of child care slots for infants and toddlers so desperately needed as well as provide tools for recruiting, training, and retaining the specialized workforce needed in the field of Early Childhood Education.

The work continues, and success is made possible through our many partnerships and our generous and passionate donors.

In 2023, we:

- Creatively worked to bring millions in Federal dollars to this project through New Markets Tax Credits.
- Hosted 3 successful events that brought together major community leaders to rally around the critical need of early care and education expansion.
- Jerry and Pam Bruni and Ent Credit Union made significant gifts to help narrow the funding gap.

We are excited for our future and committed to expanding our capacity to ensure ALL children have access to the highest quality care!

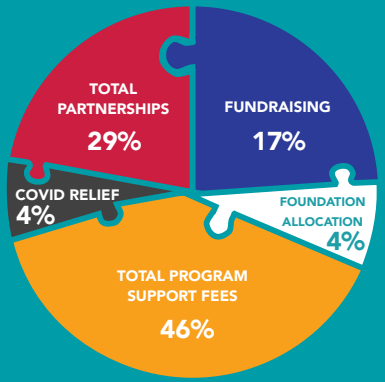

earlyconnections

2023 financials



87% of all revenue is invested back into the children and families in our care. Your investment, El Paso County's future.

REVENUE



2023 INCOME

Fundraising . . . $1,036,794

Program Support Fees. . $2,803,331

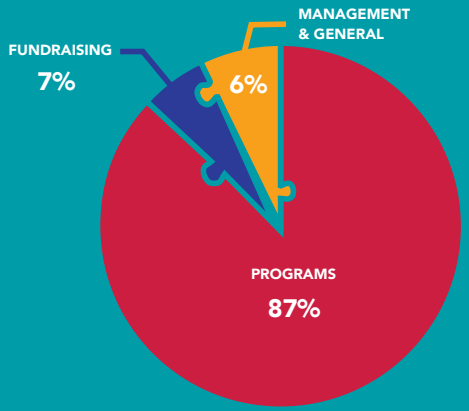
Partnerships . . $1,799,163

COVID Relief. . $220,433

Foundation Allocation $240,000

TOTAL $6,099,721*

EXPENSES



2023 EXPENSES

Fundraising . . . $488,706

Management & General $375,421

Programs. $5,668,242

TOTAL $6,532,369

*In 2023, Early Connections felt the brunt of challenges faced by the early education industry nationally. As critical pandemic-related funding ended, we also faced a shortage of qualified teaching staff which impacted our ability to maintain operations at full capacity. As a result, revenue was impacted significantly.

Meet the Seiddman-Krienke Family





At Early Connections, we support and care for ALL children and their families, knowing that how one defines a family, and their genesis can be as diverse and beautiful as a stained-glass kaleidoscope. For Jason and Emily, their path towards parenthood and ultimately growing into a family of five did not follow a conventional route. Never in their wildest dreams could they have imagined being the family they are today.

With open hearts, Jason and Emily decided they would try fostering. In March 2017, their lives were forever changed when they received a phone call about not one, but two children who needed temporary care: a 3-month-old baby girl and her older brother. With an immediate, "yes," their journey began. As a full-time working family, taking immediate responsibility for two children brought instant joy and challenges.

Early Connections offered some solutions. Emily learned about us through a friend, and our high-quality care combined with our sliding scale fee program made the child care they desperately needed for their family possible. Taking on two kids was a large financial commitment, and having access to affordable and reliable care provided a huge relief.

Emily shared, "From the beginning, Early Connections was more than just a crucial child care solution. Our son's first teacher, Ms. Stacy, was a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, and one of our biggest cheerleaders. She helped us navigate uncharted territory while supporting Noah both academically and emotionally, and she even came to celebrate with us at our adoption! We are grateful that Early Connections helped lay a strong foundation for Noah (and later for Charlie) during a critical period of development."

Jason and Emily adopted Noah and his little sister Charlie, who continue to be in our care. We are happy to share that Charlie and Noah welcomed a sister in summer 2022, baby Hazel. This family of five is just one example highlighting the transformative and crucial impact Early Connections has on our community.

Our team

Executive Management

Liz Denson
President and CEO

Ashley Groves
Vice President of Community Engagement

Brandi Bergh
Vice President of Center Operations

Jesse Vick
Vice President of Finance

Nissa Buth
Vice President of Human Resources

Josie Watters
Vice President of Home Operations

2023 Board of Directors

George Luke, *Chair*
Retired, Colorado Springs Utilities

Tammy Havens, *Vice Chair*
Senior Technical Product Manager,
Compassion International

Claire Nutter, *Treasurer*
Deputy District Attorney II, Office of
the 4th Judicial District Attorney

Lauren Ragland, *Secretary*
Process Engineer, Keysight Technologies

Deborah Layne
Controller, Insurance Technologies

Janae Langreck
Community Association Manager,
Dorman Association Management

Janet Brugger
CEO, Jbrugger Consulting, LLC

Kim Roberson
Western Region Development Officer,
Morehead-Cain Foundation

Maureen Smith Lawrence
Senior Vice President General Counsel, and
Regional Partnerships Program Officer,
El Pomar Foundation

Robert Gonzales
Director of Marketing, Hammond Law Group

Sandra Dye
Community Member

Sandy Jaray
Community Member

Sandy Schroeder
Community Member

Our Future *starts here*

ANTLERS PLACE

Ages 18 months to 6 years

HISTORIC DAY NURSERY

Ages 2 ½ to 16 years

SOUTH CHELTON

Ages 6 weeks to 6 years

SAND CREEK

Ages 5 to 12 years

earlyconnections.org



Photos by Melani Tutt

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LEARNING CENTERS

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

CPCD...giving children a head start

Court Care of the Pikes Peak Region

Harrison School District 2

Colorado Springs School District 11

Photos by Melani Tutt, Early Connections Staff, and Stellar Propeller Studio

COLORADO SHINES
START EARLY START STRONG
QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

Early Learning naeyc ACCREDITED Program

United Way
Pikes Peak United Way

Your contributions make it possible to provide the children and families in our care what they need and deserve to succeed.

TOGETHER, WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

To give your voice, time, or make a donation, visit earlyconnections.org

earlyconnections.org · 104 East Rio Grande Street Colorado Springs, CO 80903