

Momentum & Milestones 2024

IMPACT REPORT

earlyconnections℠ LEARNING CENTERS

127 years of providing high quality early education



A Letter From Liz

Dear friends,

What a year! 2024 was truly one for the books! I am deeply grateful for the unwavering commitment of our community to Early Connections Learning Centers and your belief in the power of early education. Last year was a remarkable journey, marked by challenges that tested our resilience and milestones that reaffirmed our mission of providing high quality, affordable early care and education to children and families in Colorado Springs.

With your support, the below accomplishments were made possible:

- The purchase of **415 Sahwatch Street**, the future home of the **Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education.**
- A **record-breaking** Gingerbread & Jazz event, fueled by the generosity of our supporters.
- Piloting and implementing innovative staffing solutions, including a **four-day, 10-hour workweek,** which improved work-life balance, strengthened recruitment and retention, and earned recognition at the Early Childhood Awards.
- Investments in **IT support**, optimizing system performance, streamlining processes, and enhancing service delivery for families and staff.
- The local launch of the **Early Childhood Business Council** and the **Family Friendly City Summit**, uniting leaders to champion early education as a driver of economic development, and I'm honored to serve on the committee.
- A growing **national conversation** around early education. I had the privilege of meeting with legislators at the National Child Care Innovation Summit to discuss policies that strengthen early education systems nationwide.

None of these achievements would have been possible without you. Thank you for standing with us as we continue to break down barriers and ensure all children have access to the high-quality early education they need and deserve. Together, we will build on this momentum, driving innovation and transforming possibilities into realities for every family in our community.

On behalf of our board, staff, and the children and families we serve, thank you!

Liz

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 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 127-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 gaining economic mobility.





SCHOOL READINESS

90% **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 2023-2024 evaluation year, the overall average of children meeting or exceeding developmental benchmarks increased from 85% in Fall 2023 to 90% in Spring 2024.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY MEALS

108,063 **Meals Served in 2024**

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.

2024 Program highlights



BOOKS AT HOME

2,136 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

32% of Children Cared for Received Support

In 2024, 32% of Early Connections students received special needs services (speech, physical, occupational therapies, Applied Behavioral Analysis Therapy, play therapy, etc.). **This is a nearly 25% increase over the last 5 years.**

472 Children Cared For

STOCKINGS FOR KIDS

350 Kids Stockings

2024 marked the 28th annual Stockings for Kids program helping to create a positive and memorable holiday by giving gifts to children and siblings of Early Connections Learning Centers. Many families struggle to make ends meet and holiday gifts are beyond their reach. Hundreds of community donors and volunteers came together in support of our children and their families.

HOME NETWORK OF THE PIKES PEAK REGION

213 Children in the Home Network

In 2024, we served 213 children and their families in addition to 21 small business owners and nine assistant teachers through the Home Network. Family Child Care homes are one of the most prevalent child care arrangements in the United States, particularly for minorities 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.

62%

of the families we serve are single parents or guardians.

35 families identified as homeless.

21 families were active-duty military sevice members.





99% of the children in our care were provided support through tuition assistance. Among these children, **60%** receive state subsidy, the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program.

Nearly one-third of the children in our care—close to 100 families—fall within federal poverty guidelines. For a family of four, this means they make less than **$600 per week** which qualifies them for Head Start and Early Head Start.



74% of the families we serve qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Investing in the future of Colorado Springs

Today, our city is home to more than 480,000 residents, and Colorado Springs is growing rapidly, with downtown seeing a surge in both new residents and a growing workforce. But the need for affordable, high quality early education isn't just about those living downtown—it's also critical for those who work there. As businesses expand, working families need reliable child care close to their jobs, strengthening both our economy and community. Early Connections is meeting this demand, ensuring that downtown remains a place where everyone can thrive!

Families cannot fully participate in the economy without reliable and affordable access to child care, yet the cost of care continues to rise. Data collected in 2024 by the UCCS Economic Forum, and Joint Initiatives for Youth and Families, found that the average cost for child care exceeds $16,000 per year, per child. For many working families, this is simply out of reach. At the same time, they found that our community needs nearly 17,000 additional child care slots to meet demand.

Investing in children and families today is an investment in our future. That's why we remain committed to expanding our capacity to meet these growing needs of our community. This past year our Building Futures Campaign focused on closing the funding gap necessary to bring the new Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education (ABT Center) to life.

ABT will expand access to early education by adding 70 slots with an emphasis on infant and toddler care. The facility will also be home to one of the region's first and only dedicated professional development centers for both center-based and at-home early educators.

This transformational work is made possible through strong partnerships and the generosity of our dedicated supporters.

In 2024, we achieved the following milestones:

- Secured the allocation of $2 million in New Markets Tax Credits (NMTC), a federal program designed to bring investment to economically distressed areas. This program hasn't been utilized in El Paso County for nearly 15 years.
- Purchased the future home of the Alice Bemis Taylor Center at 415 Sahwatch Street.
- Raised $2.5 million in support (over and above the NMTC allocation) from both individuals and foundations in support of this project.





The Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education

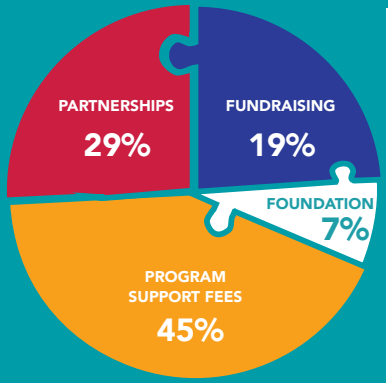
Together, we are transforming early education in Colorado Springs—one bold step at a time. The Alice Bemis Taylor Center is just the beginning. With every expansion, we are breaking down barriers, creating opportunities for families to break the cycle of poverty, and ensuring that every child has access to the highest quality early education. This is part of a greater vision, one that redefines what's possible for our children, families, community and the future of Early Connections. Together, we are building the future.

2024 financials



85% of all revenue is invested into programs supporting the children and families in our care. Your investment, El Paso County's future.

*REVENUE



2024 INCOME

Fundraising.....$1,235,232

Program
Support Fees.....$2,883,472

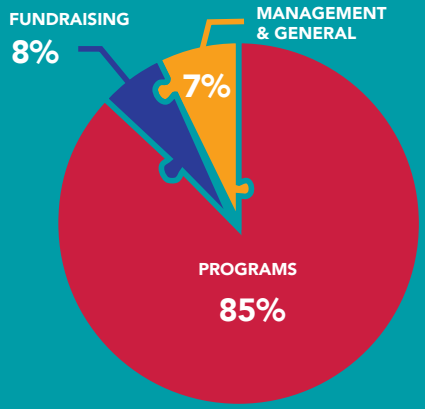
Partnerships.....$1,884,409

Foundation.....$469,842

TOTAL.....$6,472,995

*Unaudited

*EXPENSES



2024 EXPENSES

Fundraising.....$510,643

Management
& General.....$469,248

Programs.....$5,535,631

TOTAL.....$6,515,522

The Taylor Family:

Strength, Service, and Stability





Shayla and her family first arrived in Colorado Springs in 2015, drawn by her husband Lawrence's military assignment. The city quickly became home, offering a strong sense of community. In 2020, Lawrence transitioned out of active duty, opening the door for Shayla to continue their family's tradition of service as Specialist Taylor.

After a brief relocation to Fort Hood, Texas, the Taylors returned to Colorado Springs in 2022. Finding child care was a top priority, but navigating military life made it complicated. On-post child care waitlists stretched beyond a year, and since the Taylors weren't dual-military or a single-parent household, they were placed at the bottom of the priority list.

Early Connections had supported them before, and it became their trusted choice once again. With multiple locations, the Taylors found a solution that met all their needs. Their oldest daughter Lauren reconnected with beloved teachers at the Day Nursery location, while Autumn, their middle child, began her journey at our Chelton location. The transition was seamless, providing much-needed stability during yet another move.

"The deep bonds our children have with their teachers make all the difference," Shayla shares. "They've had to adjust to so many new places, but the care and consistency at Early Connections has helped them thrive."

Relocating three times as a military family has been challenging, but it has also given their children unique opportunities to learn and grow. Shayla believes Early Connections has played a crucial role in shaping their adaptability and confidence.

Between deployments, relocations, and service commitments, this family with their four kids—Lauren (8), Aiden (7), Autumn (5), and Leilani (1)—cherish their time together by exploring museums, swimming, and embracing the experiences that military life provides. Their story is one of resilience, love, and the power of a supportive community.

Our team

Executive Leadership Team

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

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Deborah Layne
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Janet Brugger
CEO, Jbrugger Consulting, LLC

Carissa Ruben
Community Member

Sandy Jaray
Community Member

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

Robert Gonzales
Regional Account Manager, First Onsite Property Restoration

Sandra Dye
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

earlyconnections℠
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