

Building a *legacy*

Reflecting on 125 Years

2022

IMPACT REPORT





A Letter from *our President*

Dear friends,

125 years ago, fourteen women recognized a need in our community. They saw the need for a place for children to be cared for when their parents were unable to care for them. To this day, our commitment to these early tenets has never changed. Over the last 125 years, Early Connections Learning Centers has responded to the needs of children and families in our community; never compromising on the quality of care provided. You all are part of our history, building upon our legacy and laying the foundation for our future, and for that, thank you.

Thank you for believing in the future of our community by investing your time, talent, and treasure in its children. Thank you for sharing our story with your friends and family and giving voice to the importance of early education. And, by doing these things, thank you for creating opportunities for children and families to access high quality early education, building the foundations for success in school and in life.

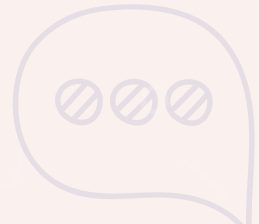
2022 was a year of transitions. The State of Colorado launched the Department of Early Childhood, paving the way for early education to have an equal seat in representing the needs of our state's youngest citizens. In addition to this major transition at the state level, Early Connections experienced its own transition with the retirement of our longtime President & CEO, Diane Price.

Amidst these transitions, we successfully returned to our pre-pandemic child enrollment and teacher staffing levels and are poised to effectively implement the State's new Universal Preschool Program in 2023. We also made significant strides in our campaign to build the new Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education, reaching 50% of our goal in 2022.

Looking back at the last 125 years, a common thread runs throughout: friends, like you, who have helped us build a legacy of providing high quality early education for all children, supporting families as they work or go to school, and laying the foundation for our future leaders. Thank you for your continued trust and support as we look to the next 125 years.

With gratitude,

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 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 each child meeting or exceedingly widely held expectations 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 125+ 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, especially to support recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.

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



94% 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. The average of children meeting or exceeding developmental benchmarks increased from 80% in Fall 2021 to 94% in Spring 2022.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY MEALS



104,964 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 nutritionally-sound breakfast and lunch along with a snack each day.

Program highlights

BOOKS AT HOME

 **1,976** Books Distributed

Early Connections' curriculum integrates learning and emerging literacy into all facets of the classroom through children's books. To extend learning beyond the classroom, each child enrolled at Early Connections received a new book each month through our Books at Home program to build home libraries and emphasize the importance of reading.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

 **20%** of Children Cared for Received Support

In 2022, 20% of children served received some sort of special needs service (speech, physical, occupational therapies, Applied Behavior Analysis, etc.). This is a 12% increase from 2020 and does not include children still waiting to receive necessary services. Our Behavioral Health Program is critical to the success of the child, the family, and their teachers.



523 Children Cared For

STOCKINGS FOR KIDS

 **339** Kid's Stockings

2022 marked the 27th annual Stockings for Kids program which helps to create a positive and memorable holiday season for the children and siblings of Early Connections Learning Centers. Many families struggle to make ends meet and holiday gifts can be 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

 **460** Children and Their Families were Served

In 2022, we served 460 children and their families in addition to 22 small business owners, through the Home Network. Family Child Care Homes are critical to support the growing demand in the child care industry. Through our partnership with these small businesses, we can not only meet the needs of families but also provide these traditionally female-owned businesses with continuous quality improvement and professional development.



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.

Of the children in our care, an alarming

98% require tuition assistance.

Even more striking is the fact that

62% of these children are on state subsidy, indicating that they come from families with limited financial means.

To be eligible for state subsidy, a family must have an income of

less than \$613 week.





62%

of families we serve are
single parents or guardians.



43 families identified
as homeless.



60 families were active-duty
service members.



Capacity building

As we look to the future and the next 125 years, we know to meet the needs of our community we must amplify our reach by expanding capacity.

The pandemic exacerbated the need for early care and education. The lack of access to affordable and quality child care is the number one reason parents cite leaving the workforce. Two demographics that have been disproportionately impacted by the lack of access to affordable and high quality care and education are families with low to moderate income and women. The cost of care and limited slots due to workforce shortages are just a few of the barriers facing Coloradans, and directly impacts our early learners, families, and ultimately the financial viability and economic stability of our community. We know access to early care and education is critical as 90% of a child's brain is developed before entering Kindergarten and at-risk children are 75% more likely to stay in school and 40% more likely to attend college when they have a strong early education. We see and experience firsthand how our families and communities thrive when they have access to early care and education.

By 2025, Early Connections will break ground on a state-of-the-art education center that addresses the crisis facing early care and education in two distinct ways: increase our child care slots by 50% and increase the number of skilled early educators with a hands-on regional professional development center for early educators across Colorado.

This 18,000 square foot building will be a learning tool, designed to encourage children to explore the world around them and provide a space to attract and retain excellent educators across the region.

Our evidence-based model is the feature of early childhood education for the teacher, the child, their family, and this community.





 earlyconnections
LEARNING CENTERS

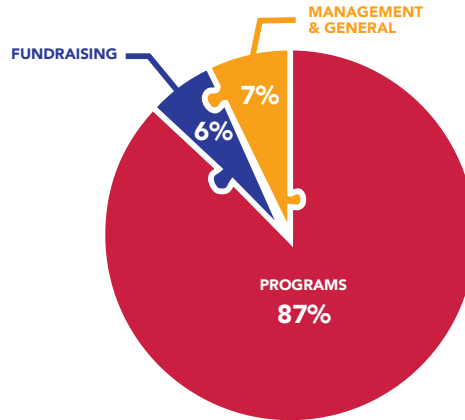
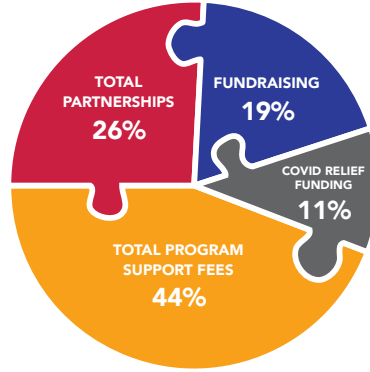


2022 financials

Thanks to our generous community, Early Connections Learning Centers creates a space where a revenue of **\$6,427,041** allows children, regardless of their family's income, to learn, play and grow.

87%

of all revenue is invested back into the children and families in our care.



2022 INCOME

Program Support Fees . . .	\$2,817,305
Partnerships . . .	\$1,647,332
Fundraising . . .	\$1,248,968
COVID Relief Funding	\$713,436
Foundation Allocation*	\$0

TOTAL \$6,427,041

2022 EXPENSES

Programs	\$5,332,991
Management & General	\$435,022
Fundraising . . .	\$349,899

TOTAL \$6,117,912

*In 2022, due to one-time COVID relief funding, we were fortunate to not have to take our foundation allocation.

Why we give

I first became acquainted with Early Connections around 2005 during a tour with the Woman's Club. I was so impressed with the history and of course, the historic building. After hearing its mission to provide high-quality comprehensive early care and education for ALL children, I knew that I needed to be involved with this organization. Once I was involved, that meant Mike would also be fully committed. After several years of volunteering and helping with fundraising, I then had the privilege of serving on the board.

While serving on the board, I witnessed first-hand the dedicated leadership team and staff working to fulfill the mission. It also gave me the opportunity to interact with the children through reading, doing crafts and just seeing their smiling faces in the classrooms. A special time was having lunch with the 4-year-olds.

After serving ten years on the board, we will continue to support Early Connections through volunteer and financial support through the Annual Giving Program. We are also committed to the "Building Futures" campaign to build a new Antlers center named the Alice Bemis Taylor Center, named after one of the "Founding Mothers," and who built the historic Day Nursery. The ABT center will expand services and create much-needed additional capacity to provide high-quality early education. Please join us in supporting the Early Connections Learning Centers."

- Mike and Diane Bell
Supporters since 2005



Our team

Current Executive Leadership Team

Liz Denson

President and CEO

Ashley Groves

Vice President of Community Engagement

Cindy Morgan

Executive Vice President of Operations

Susan Rose

Vice President of Finance

Stephanie Tweet

Vice President of Human Resources

Josie Watters

Vice President of Home Operations

Foundation Board of Trustees

Lisa Cleary, President

Retired · Colorado Springs Utilities

Diane Bell

Community Member

Lou Lemesany

Community Member

George Luke

Retired · Colorado Springs Utilities

George H. Wayne, Jr.

Vice President, Market Services · Kinder Morgan

2022 Board of Directors

George Luke, Chair

Retired · Colorado Springs Utilities

Tammy Rahaim, Vice Chair

*Applications Manager ·
Colorado Springs Utilities*

Diane Bell, Treasurer

Community Member

Claire Nutter, Secretary

*Deputy District Attorney II · Office of
the 4th Judicial District Attorney*

Barb Aylward

Community Member

Mel Cramm

Project Manager · Faith Enterprises Incorporated

Robert Gonzales

*Business Development Manager ·
All Phase Restoration*

Sandy Jaray

Community Member

Deborah Layne

Controller · Insurance Technologies

Lauren Ragland

Process Engineer · Keysight Technologies

Kim Roberson

*Western Region Development Officer ·
Morehead-Cain Foundation*

Sandy Schroeder

Community Member

Amy Thacker

*Chief Operating Officer · First Affirmative
Financial Network*

Mary Beth Williams

Community Member

Our Future

starts here

ANTLERS PLACE

Ages 18 months to 6 years

HISTORIC DAY NURSERY

Ages 3 to 16 years

SOUTH CHELTON

Ages 6 weeks to 6 years

SAND CREEK

Ages 5 to 12 years





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*



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](https://www.earlyconnections.org)

[earlyconnections.org](https://www.earlyconnections.org) • 104 East Rio Grande Street Colorado Springs, CO 80903

