



Built for this Moment 2025

IMPACT REPORT



128 years of providing high
quality early education



Dear friends, **A Letter From** *our President*

As I reflect on this past year at Early Connections Learning Centers, I am grateful for the strength of our community and the shared commitment that guides our mission. 2025 was not an easy year. It tested systems, stretched families, and asked more of educators and the early childhood education industry.

Across the country and here in Colorado, our industry faced deep uncertainty. Rising costs, workforce shortages, and strained systems destabilized families and providers alike.

Most notably, the enrollment freeze in the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) blocked thousands of eligible families from accessing care right here in El Paso County. Parents left work or paused their education. Children lost early learning opportunity in a time of critical brain development.

This was not theoretical. We saw it in the families who reached out for support and in the growing number we simply could not serve.

We met these pressures head on. Alongside our families and staff, we worked every day to preserve access, affordability, and stability at a time when each felt increasingly strained. Our commitment to excellent early education never wavered.

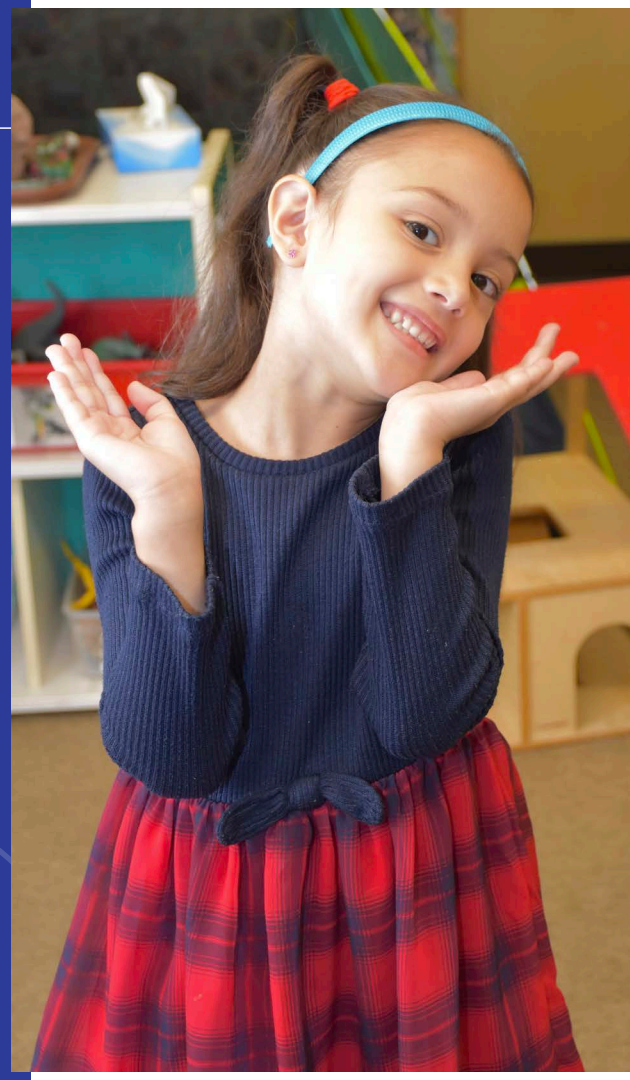
For 128 years, Early Connections has existed to meet moments like this one. Founded by fourteen women who believed children and families deserved care and opportunity, our organization has always stood at the intersection of compassion and action. For more than a century, our strength has come from a shared investment model rooted in public support, private generosity, and meaningful parent partnership, working together to ensure quality remains strong and access stays within reach.

Our legacy of determination and driving solutions matters now more than ever. Even amid uncertainty, we moved forward together. In 2025, we broke ground on the Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education, an eight-million-dollar investment that will replace an aging and inefficient center and create fifty new child care spaces, including thirty infant and toddler slots where the need is greatest. This milestone reflects resolve, shared commitment, and belief in what is possible when a community works together.

Because of you, our donors, partners, and advocates, Early Connections remains strong and steady in our mission. You make it possible for families to say yes to opportunity and for children to thrive, even in challenging times.

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 Support Services 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 128-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.



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 2024-2025 evaluation year, the overall average of children meeting or exceeding developmental benchmarks increased from 75% in Fall 2024 to 91% in Spring 2025.

ACCESS TO HEALTHY MEALS



107,615 Meals Served in 2025

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.

2025 Program highlights

BOOKS AT HOME



1,817

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



35%

of Children Cared for
Received Support

In 2025, 35% of Early Connections students received special needs services (speech, physical, occupational therapies, Applied Behavioral Analysis Therapy, play therapy, etc.). **This represents a nearly 28% increase over the past six years.**



439

Children
Cared For

STOCKINGS FOR KIDS



270

Kids Stockings

2025 marked the 29th 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



253

Children in the
Home Network

In 2025, we served 253 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.

60%

of the families we serve are single parents or guardians.

7

 families identified as homeless.

*A 70% decrease from last year, driven by newly unhoused families being unable to access the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program.

19

 families were active-duty military service members.



Access is Not Optional

99% of the children in our care receive tuition assistance.

- 57% rely on the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP).
- Nearly one-third live within federal poverty guidelines.
*This means a family of four making less than \$800 per week.
- 75% qualify for free or reduced lunch.

For many of our families, access to early education is only possible with external support.



Since 2024, the CCCAP freeze has prevented newly eligible families from enrolling, limiting access to care and delaying parents' ability to return to work or school, particularly during the infant years when care is most expensive.

Expanding Capacity: *Spaces & People*

Colorado Springs continues to grow, bringing new residents, expanding employers, and increasing demand for reliable, affordable child care. Meeting that demand requires more than growth in a single area. It requires intentional investment in both physical space and the people who make high quality early education possible.

In 2025, we took a significant step forward by beginning **construction** on the Alice Bemis Taylor Center for Early Education. This new facility will replace an aging and inefficient center and create fifty licensed child care slots, with an emphasis on infant and toddler care, and will include dedicated space for professional development. This center will strengthen access to care while also supporting the early childhood workforce across the region.

We also know expanding capacity cannot rely on a singular project. Early Connections continues to evaluate and implement new models that integrate child care into broader community solutions. This includes partnerships that align early education with affordable housing and workforce development, ensuring families can access care where they live and work. These efforts reflect a long-term strategy focused on sustainable growth and equitable access.

Equally critical to capacity is investment in people. High quality early education depends on a stable, supported, and well-trained workforce. **In 2025, Early Connections launched a federally registered apprenticeship program and credential-based compensation structure.** We are creating clear pathways for professional growth, leadership development, and long-term retention in the field of early education.

In 2025, this commitment resulted in 15 promotions within our centers, 9 credential-based pay increases, and additional performance-based advancements, alongside organization-wide wage and salary scale increases. This momentum carries into 2026 as more educators' complete credentials and advance into leadership roles through the apprenticeship pathway.

Together, these investments in space and people strengthen our ability to serve children, support families, and respond to the evolving needs of Colorado Springs. By building capacity thoughtfully and intentionally, Early Connections is laying the groundwork for a strong, accessible early education system today and for years to come.



Our Community in Action

Early Connections is strengthened by the people and partners who show up alongside us. Throughout the year, volunteers, community leaders, and local organizations engage directly with our centers, classrooms, and children, helping bring our mission to life.



Volunteer Impact in 2025

- 210 Volunteers
- 1,752 Hours
- \$67,891 in value

Gingerbread & Jazz

Our signature event remains one of the most successful ways our community gathers together to raise critical support for children. 2025 proved to be our most successful to date, with 350 guests contributing \$260,000 -- a 36% increase from previous years!



Read Across America Day

This event brings community into classrooms to celebrate early literacy through shared stories and personal connections. In 2025, Sandy's Challenge, a new matching gift program, raised over \$27,000 that supported literacy-building. It also supported programs like Books at Home.



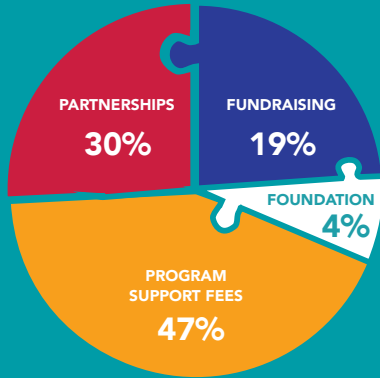
2025 financials



85%

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

*REVENUE

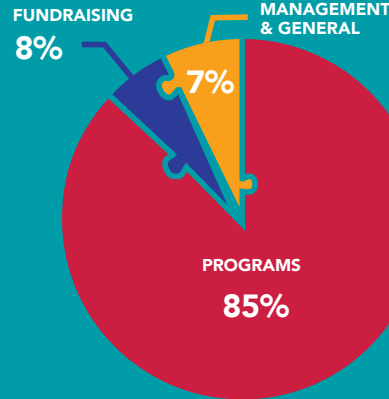


*Unaudited

2025 INCOME

Fundraising.....	\$1,133,488
Program Support Fees.....	\$2,814,714
Partnerships.....	\$1,807,204
Foundation.....	\$224,480
TOTAL.....	\$5,979,886

*EXPENSES



2025 EXPENSES

Fundraising.....	\$539,532
Management & General.....	\$458,117
Programs.....	\$5,418,057
TOTAL.....	\$6,415,705

This year reflected a challenging environment with significant external factors beyond our control including the enrollment freeze with the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program and the unexpected closure of a partnership program. Within our control, we also navigated planned investments for future expansion. Early Connections remains strong, supported by careful planning and generous community partnership, and focused on sustainable impact for the children and families we serve.

Where Hope Found a Home

When Bradley arrived at Early Connections, his family was not simply looking for child care. They were looking for a lifeline.

As an infant, Bradley suffered a traumatic brain injury that will shape parts of his development for years to come. Early in his life, everything changed, and his grandmother, Leigh, was granted custody, stepping in to provide the safety, stability, and love he needed. She brought him to Colorado with hope, but also with the weight of starting over completely.

At 50 years old, she suddenly found herself parenting again, navigating new systems, new specialists, and the daily reality of raising a child with complex needs. Even with prior experience navigating support systems, she shared how isolating and overwhelming it felt to search for the right resources in an unfamiliar place.

They tried another program, but it wasn't enough. The services were limited. The costs were impossible. And once again, it felt like the world was telling this family they were on their own.

Then she found Early Connections.

From the very beginning, the Early Connections team did more than welcome Bradley. We met him with intention. We partnered with his grandmother. We helped coordinate the therapies he needed. We made space for his growth, his challenges, and his strengths. Teachers went out of their way to ensure Bradley was not set apart, but fully included, supported not only through speech and occupational therapy, but through friendship, confidence, and belonging.

Today, Bradley is not defined by his injury or circumstance. He is defined by the joy he brings into the classroom, the progress he makes each day, and the community that surrounds him.

At Early Connections, families like Bradley's don't just find early education.

They find hope. They find support. They find a place to begin again.



Bradley shared this drawing of himself on the playground at ECLC — where he feels happiest.



Our team

Executive Leadership Team

Liz Denson

President and CEO

Ashley Groves

Vice President of Community Engagement

Brandi Bergh

Vice President of Center Operations

Douglas G. Martin

Vice President of Business Operations

Nissa Buth

Vice President of Human Resources

Josie Watters

Vice President of Home Operations

Foundation Board of Trustees

George H. Wayne Jr., President and Trustee

Vice President, Market Services · Kinder Morgan

Claire Nutter, Trustee

Deputy District Attorney II, Office of the 4th Judicial District Attorney

Tammy Havens, Trustee

Senior Technical Product Manager, Compassion International

Ann Ries, Trustee

First Vice President, Financial Advisor Morgan Stanley Wealth Management

Amy Thacker, Secretary & Trustee

Retirement Solutions Director Nationwide

Board of Directors

Tammy Havens, Chair

Senior Technical Product Manager, Compassion International

Lauren Ragland, Vice Chair

Process Engineer, Keysight Technologies

Claire Nutter, Treasurer

Deputy District Attorney II, Office of the 4th Judicial District Attorney

Kim Roberson, Secretary

Senior Director of Institutional Giving, Rewiring America

Mitchell McNeil

Software Engineer, Bluestaq LLC

Janet Brugger

CEO, Jbrugger Consulting, LLC

Carissa Ruben

M.A., Marriage and Family Therapy, Counselor, Educational Advocate

Gregory Thatcher

VP Investments, Raymond James & Associates

Rebecca Limoge

Founder & Principal, Limoge Consulting

Maureen Smith Lawrence

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

Robert J. Gonzales

Community Member

Antonio Huerta

Community Leader & Advocate

Deborah Layne

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**

Closed in August of 2025

earlyconnections.org

Photos by Melani Tutt





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

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