



Early Childhood Council

of LARIMER COUNTY

2020-21 ANNUAL REPORT

Adapting and Evolving for Our Community

www.ecclc.org / 970.377.3388 / info@ecclc.org

ADAPTING AND EVOLVING FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Letter from Early Childhood Council of Larimer County's CEO and Board President

Dear Early Childhood Champion,

As we navigated a year unlike any other—one that tested the resiliency and perseverance of our educators, directors, staff, and families alike—Early Childhood Council of Larimer County grew in every way imaginable. From grant funding to team members and from coaching to early childhood mental services, our Council adapted and evolved to continue to lead our community and our state to ensure every child thrives from day one.

As we reflect on the past year, we can confidently say that our Council is stronger, more determined, and better able to meet the challenges of early care and education in Larimer County. A few of the highlights of this past year can be found on page 3.

One of the most inspiring elements from this past year was the unwavering passion our early childhood champions have for our work and our children. The early care and education crisis in Larimer County remains an urgent priority, and Early Childhood Council of Larimer County, along with partners, providers, and community members, is committed to finding sustainable, equitable long-term solutions. Based on 2019 estimates, licensed capacity for child care is only 25%

of projected demand for infants and toddlers, and only 64% for preschool-age children. While the early care and education crisis in Larimer County has been exacerbated by the pandemic, the issues fueling the crisis including inadequate pay, sluggish workforce development, rising cost of care, and demand that has outpaced supply were prevalent well before COVID-19 arrived. The Council will continue to lead the way in solving this crisis. We remain inspired and grateful for the continued support and collaboration from partners like you.



This past year taught us that there is much to celebrate and much to learn. With your continued support, Early Childhood Council of Larimer County will continue to adapt and evolve to meet the needs of our children and our community. As you know, we only get one childhood. When every young child is cared for in an environment that invigorates their learning and supports their wellbeing, they are set up for a life of health and happiness, which elevates our entire community.

Thank you—

Christina Taylor
CEO

Mims Harris
President, Board of Directors

BY THE NUMBERS

2020-2021 Highlights

86

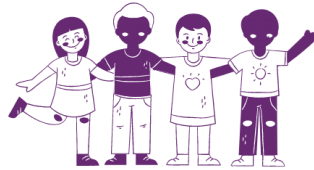
scholarships for
current early
childhood education
(ECE) providers
totaling more than



\$54,000

4

new participants in the
Provisional Early Childhood
Teacher (P-ECT) waiver



22

new family child care home
(FCH) licensed programs
in Larimer County



Increased scholarship
giving by
\$15,000
through a partnership with
Front Range Community
College Foundation

Early
Childhood
Council

Held **16** ECE trainings
with **260** attendees



supported **42** early care
and education programs

provided more than

800+

hours of direct coaching



\$100K+

in quality improvement funding

ELEVATING EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Pilot Programs, Collaboration Catapult ECMH Program

There's no denying that early childhood mental health (ECMH) plays a vital role in the health, happiness, and success of children not just when they are young, but throughout their entire lives. We know that disadvantaged families are disproportionately impacted by risk factors that lead to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Research shows the most rapid period of brain development occurs during the first few years, and that early childhood experiences create a foundation for the future (Harvard Center on the Developing Child). Longitudinal studies confirm that young children experiencing stress without access to strong supports have poorer outcomes in school, health, and life (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

The research and data make the case for the “why.” This past year, Early Childhood Council of Larimer County has been intently focused on the “what to do.” The first step in the process was officially creating the Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Program to better integrate mental health efforts with that of the Council. Led by Liz Means, ECMH Program Director, the ECMH Program put early childhood mental health front and center. And the program is only just getting started. Here's a look back at what the ECMH Program accomplished this past year:

- Fully incorporated the Leap Coalition (Leap) as a program area of the Council, the ECMH Program. From the beginning,

the Council provided backbone support for Leap. Now, as a fully embedded program area of the Council, the work that was started and stewarded by Leap has a permanent home. By better integrating Leap's work with that of the Council, redundancies are reduced and existing resources and infrastructure that the Council provides are fully utilized.

- Partnered with three ECE centers for site-wide implementation of the Pyramid Model with the Council's Early Childhood Coaching Team. Site-specific Pyramid trainings were offered and each site conducted pre-TPOT/TPITOS assessments. When implemented with fidelity, social-emotional programming can reduce the use of inappropriate discipline practices, promote family engagement, increase data use for decision-making, integrate early childhood and infant mental health consultation and early intervention, and foster sustainable inclusion interactions.

“We believe the cross-sector partnership that ECCLC has convened to address the early childhood workforce crisis in our community has the potential to make a substantial difference.”

- Joe Ziegler, Education Director,
The Family Center/La Familia

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ELEVATING EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH (cont.)

- Provided ongoing sponsorship for professionals seeking the Colorado Association for Infant Mental Health (COAIMH) Infant Mental Health Endorsement (IMH-E). Eleven participants completed the endorsement, including the six CSU interns and five professionals in the ECE system. The 8-week course facilitated by COAIMH provided 18-22 hours of IECMH-focused training. This work directly supports the Council's goal to have at least 50 early childhood professionals in Larimer County with the COAIMH endorsement by July 2025.
- Successfully launched an ECMH Fellowship Pilot Program through the CSU School of Social Work. This fellowship was supported by a grant from the Larimer County Department of Behavioral Health Services, and 6 students (4 undergraduate students and 2 graduate students) thoughtfully engaged in the program. In addition to Early Childhood Council of Larimer County and the CSU School of Social Work, core partnering agencies instrumental to the pilot program were Poudre School District, Thompson School District, Foothills Gateway, The Family Center/La Familia, and private practice therapists. As part of the fellowship, students were able to create deep and lasting relationships with community ECMH champions. Furthermore, each student received \$5,000 stipends and were asked to sign a letter of service agreement stating that they committed to make their best efforts at finding work in the family service field in Larimer County for at least 12 months after graduation. Read more about the pilot program [here](#).



"It has increased my interest in ECMH. I entered with an interest but unsure if this was the field I wanted to work in long term. Now, my plans post graduation include looking for an ECMH-based job. It also has increased my interest in maternal mental health specifically, as well as working with families."

- Participant in the ECMH Fellowship Pilot Program through the CSU School of Social Work

- Piloted a new project, Early Childhood Mental Health (ECMH) Consultation for Adult-Serving Agencies, which is supported by a grant from the Larimer County Department of Behavioral Health Services. Together with the Council, The Willow Collective is spearheading the project. Through the collaboration, agencies and ECMH experts examine policies, practices, and structures to provide a more holistic and intentional approach to supporting families. Consultation services are tailored to each organization's unique needs and goals. Learn more [here](#).

RAISING THE BAR ON BENEFITS

New Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for Child Care Providers

Early childhood educators in Larimer County make only \$13/hour on average. As you might imagine, benefits like mental health assistance or legal advice are rarely offered in the field. Early Childhood Council of Larimer County changed that reality this past May. In partnership with ComPsych and made possible through a donation from United Way, we launched a free Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for early childhood educators.



The program is one of the ways we are moving forward with our goal of more fully supporting early childhood educators in our community. By providing access to a variety of health, financial, legal, and lifestyle services through the program, we strive to continue elevating the role of early childhood educators in our county.

Lia Closson, Early Childhood Mental Health Support Specialist at The Family Center/La Familia, helped her organization be one of the first to sign up for the program. While The Family Center had started working with ComPsych about a year before the Council introduced the offering, Closson was thrilled the Council made it more available to other providers.

“It’s an amazing resource and I love being able to offer it to our teachers,” she said. “It makes sense for the Council to hold the relationship with ComPsych so other sites could benefit.”

Closson and The Family Center team now tap into the EAP through the Council, rather than on their own. Closson often recommends the program to teachers who come to her with their stresses, which can range from legal assistance to needing help locating a counselor.

The Council launched the program in early May 2021. EAP was originally offered to all family childcare home providers and non-profit centers. The Council plans to open it up to other providers as funding permits. More information about the launch of the program can be found [here](#).

ComPsych is a worldwide provider of EAPs with almost 40 years of experience. Their GuidanceResources online platform is a versatile and easy to navigate portal with all available services listed and accessible online. It fully integrates EAP, behavioral health, wellness and absence management services. They are also available by phone 24/7 and can help connect people with the resources they need. More information can be found at compsych.com.

Advisory Council Summer Social



Thank You, Funders!

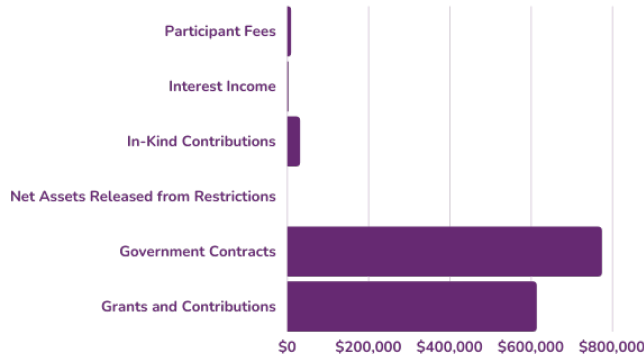
We appreciate the support provided by the following major funders during our 2020/2021 fiscal year:

Anonymous Private Foundation
Bohemian Foundation
Buell Foundation
City of Fort Collins
Early Milestones Colorado
Nordson Corporation Foundation
Larimer County Department of Behavioral Health Services
Larimer County Department of Health
Larimer County Department of Human Services
Office of Early Childhood,
Colorado Department of Human Services
United Way of Larimer County

2020-2021 FINANCIALS

From the 2021 Independent Audit, June 30, 2021

REVENUE



1.4M

TOTAL REVENUE

54%

REVENUE FROM GOVERNMENT
CONTRACTS

43%

REVENUE FROM GRANTS AND
CONTRIBUTIONS CONTRACTS

2020-2021 FINANCIALS

If you would like to review ECCLC's audited financials, please contact info@ecclc.org.

EXPENSES

1.2M

TOTAL EXPENSES

92.8%

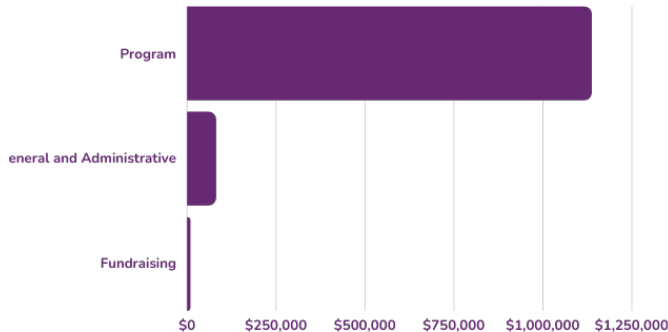
EXPENSES RELATED TO PROGRAMS

6.6%

EXPENSES FROM GENERAL AND
ADMINISTRATIVE

.6%

EXPENSES FROM FUNDRAISING



ADJUSTING TO A NEW REALITY

Virtual Ratings Bring Benefits and Challenges

When the COVID-19 pandemic uprooted life for us all, the Colorado Office of Early Childhood moved quickly and revamped its Colorado Shines ratings to be virtual. Colorado was one of the first states to implement the virtual rating process, which they rolled out in October 2020.

“Ratings stopped completely when the pandemic hit,” said Heather Soderberg, Early Childhood Coach at Early Childhood Council of



A Colorado Shines rating is a symbol of quality and a guarantee to families that a program is licensed, in good standing, and meets health and safety standards. Learn more at coloradoshines.com/programs.

education programs caring for children 5 years of age and younger. Programs are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, based on how well their program satisfies requirements tied to ensuring children's health and safety, focusing on staff training and effectiveness, fostering a supportive learning environment, partnering with parents in their

Larimer County. “The state did a great job of figuring out a virtual process so sites that needed to renew or get rated for the first time could move forward.”

Colorado Shines is the State of Colorado's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). It assigns a quality rating to licensed early care and

child's learning, and demonstrating good leadership and business practices. Ratings are updated every three years.

“It was great they were able to come up with an alternative so quickly,” said Taylor Ashby, Early Childhood Coach at Early Childhood Council of Larimer County. “I wish moving forward they would do more of a hybrid model.”

Twelve early childhood programs that the Council supports went through the virtual rating process this past fiscal year. Providers noted that advantages of the virtual rating process ranged from educators being able to better promote their learning environments, to sites developing videos that they could then use for promotional

purposes. Disadvantages included a number of items, like health, safety, and language skills simply could not be rated virtually. Sites also had to utilize technology in order to rate virtually, which carried

“I could manage my time really well preparing for a virtual rating. When raters came in person, you're not really sure when they're coming so you get yourself worked up and prepared and ready for the first day of the month, and they might not come until later in the month. Being able to submit videos allowed me to be more informational, and I could share and communicate much more about my school and what we do here.”

- Lori Schmidt, licensed child care home provider with Lori's Little Sprouts Preschool

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ADJUSTING TO A NEW REALITY (cont.)

its own obstacles for some. Every site that was due for a rating had the chance to rate virtually or postpone until in-person ratings resumed.

“Virtual ratings ensured quality in early childhood education continued,” said Logan Mansanarez, Early Childhood Coach. “It was unfortunate that they had to cut out interactions as part of the process though. I understand why it wasn’t possible to rate on that virtually, but that’s what early childhood is. It takes away the human element and importance of what the provider does. They aren’t babysitters. We work so hard to elevate the field and professionalize it, and not emphasizing interactions in the virtual rating felt like a bit of a step back.”

“I liked being able to walk into a room and look at it differently ...to see it in a whole new light. Then it was helpful to explain to teachers why it was done that way. Going through the process with Heather [Soderberg], we could figure out the ‘why’ behind what we were doing. [A downside] to the virtual ratings was not being able for the rater to see interactions between teachers and students and the relationships and how things flow. Anyone can set up a room. Interactions and relationships are lost in the virtual rating process, which are such a key part of quality child care and education.”

- Susan Moreno, Center Director,
Little Bears Child Care Riverside

12 sites rated virtually



Early Childhood Coaches Taylor Ashby and Heather Soderberg

Early Childhood Coaches supported quality child care for 42 early care and education programs with \$100,000+ in quality improvement funding and more than 800 hours of direct coaching.

EMERGING AND EXPANDING

Grants Help With Expanding Current Capacity or Opening New Child Care Programs

Opening a new child care center comes with an array of challenges, from recruiting staff to meeting licensing requirements. It can also come with a hefty price tag. For veteran Child Care Director Shayla Kaminitz, who has been in the field for nearly 15 years, start-up costs for Noco Kids Nest, a new nature-inspired center, were upwards of \$200,000.

“When creating the space, we wanted the best of all worlds—a convenient schedule, affordable rates, a quality program that focused on school readiness, a nature and Reggio Emilia approach that was kid-led with curriculum to create some structure,” she said. “The outdoor space was critical for bringing our vision to life.”

As such, Kaminitz worked closely with Taylor Ashby, an Early Childhood Coach at Early Childhood Council of Larimer County, to apply for an Emerging and Expanding Child Care Grant from Colorado’s Office of Early Childhood. Grants range from \$3,000 to \$50,000 and can be used toward expenses related to the expansion of current capacity or the opening of a new child care program. Programs must serve children ages birth to five to be eligible.

The grant was a perfect fit for Noco Kids Nest. Kaminitz was familiar with the grant from a previous site she worked for. She and Ashby met virtually to prepare the grant application. “It was really a new process for all of us,” Kaminitz said. “I would ask questions, and

Taylor would get more details. It was a true collaboration.”

Noco Kids Nest applied for \$40,000 in capital improvements and \$10,000 to be used for coaching, quality improvement, and materials. “It didn’t take long between applying and hearing about the capital improvement funding,” Kaminitz said.

This past year, Early Childhood Coaches worked closely with 4 child care providers, including Noco Kids Nest, to help them apply for (and receive) an Emerging and Expanding Child Care Grant from Colorado’s Office of Early Childhood.

Noco Kids Nest was awarded the full \$50,000 it requested; \$40,000 was used for capital improvements including landscaping for its outdoor space and playground, and \$10,000 was awarded for coaching and classroom materials.

“As a childcare provider and manager, it takes a lot of money and love to do what we do,” Kaminitz said. “Anything helps and to have something as big as a \$40,000 grant is a saving grace, especially

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EMERGING AND EXPANDING (cont.)

because we're just getting started and COVID impacted our enrollment numbers."

It was the largest single-site grant Kaminitz or Ashby have applied for. "It was so rewarding to see Noco Kids Nest get the support they need to get their site up and running," Ashby said.

Noco Kids Nest officially opened their doors June 28, 2021. Serving children ages 12 months to 7 years, the center offers flexible scheduling to accommodate as many families as possible.

Kaminitz encourages other providers to consider applying for grants as they look to open or expand. "It's free money, and every bit helps," she said. "The time you put into applying will pay off."

Before...



After...



IMPROVING ACCESS AND AWARENESS

Larimer Child Care Connect Child Care Referral Website Launches

Sometimes the best ideas are those that arise when it feels like the world is falling apart. Early Care and Education Director Heather Blanco attended a webinar hosted by BridgeCare in March 2020, just as the pandemic was gaining momentum.

"I knew this is exactly what we needed," Blanco said. "All I had been hearing for weeks was families unsure about which providers were open and if places had slots for kids. On the flip side, our providers were struggling to get the word out about their openings."

BridgeCare is a white-label SaaS solution (an avenue to deliver software via the internet) built specifically for the child care and education ecosystem. Their integrated technology makes it easier for families to find care, for providers to advertise and run their programs, and for administrators like Early Childhood Council of Larimer County to use the data collected to make decisions that positively impact our community.

More than 2,000 Larimer County families have accessed the referral website since it launched last year. Learn more at larimerchildcare.org.

LARIMER CHILD CARE •:CONNECT:•

Blanco immediately reached out to the webinar facilitators and was put in touch with Jamee Herbert, BridgeCare Co-Founder and CEO. "After we talked, I was even more excited about bringing a platform like BridgeCare to Larimer County residents," Blanco said.

Blanco looped in Early Childhood Coaches, who had heard similar stories from providers and families and felt like the BridgeCare platform would be incredibly beneficial. Blanco then presented the idea to ECCLC CEO Christina Taylor, who was fully on board but knew there may be some challenges from the state given it would be outside the state's standard referral parameters.

"We knew we needed to do something different even if we went rogue a bit," Taylor said. At the time, all referrals in the state were being run through Colorado Shines Child Care Referral at Mile High United Way. There wasn't a good process or platform in place to ensure updated information from providers at the local level.

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IMPROVING ACCESS AND AWARENESS (cont.)

Taylor successfully secured a grant from the Larimer County Department of Human Services. Within two weeks of signing the contract with BridgeCare to create a new local child care referral website, Larimer Child Care Connect (larimerchildcare.org) launched in September 2020. Larimer was the first county in Colorado to partner with BridgeCare. Since then, 3 other counties in Colorado have partnered with BridgeCare with more likely soon.

"We knew we had to do something different to break down barriers," Taylor said.

"This is really just the beginning," Blanco said. "There's so much more we can do with it, with providers, schools, and additional resources for families."



Early Childhood Educators at Young People's Learning Center during Provider Appreciation festivities in May.

CURRENT ECCLC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mims Harris - President

Karen Rattenborg - Vice President

Caroline Bunn - Secretary

Kristin Kurbjun - Treasurer

Lisa Auer - Council Liaison

Dr. Deborah Archer

Abby Callan

April Gerakos-Rooker

Melanie Gilbertson

Steve Kuehneman

Kelsey Lyon

Maria Martin

Candice Martin-O'Connor

Queen

Thad Paul

Arthur Spicciati

Averil Strand

Jane Stuart

Mary Ward

LARIMER THRIVE BY FIVE

Educational Campaign Increases Awareness

This past year, Early Childhood Council of Larimer County was thrilled to launch and lead Larimer Thrive by Five, an early childhood education public awareness campaign aimed at spurring understanding of the importance of high-quality early childhood child care and education, attracting educators, and bringing better-paying jobs to our community. From billboards to social media, the campaign has drawn in hundreds of Larimer County supporters.



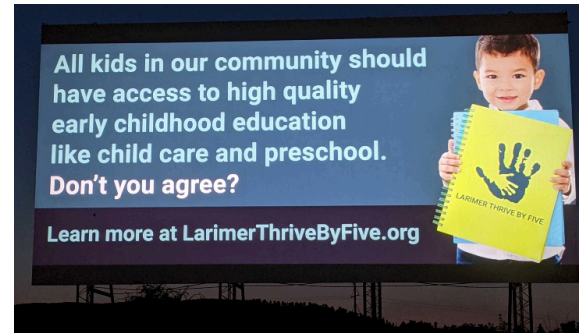
LARIMER THRIVE BY FIVE



Hundreds of Larimer County supporters are following Larimer Thrive By Five online. Learn more at larimerthrivebyfive.org.



Larimer Thrive by Five social media post (above) and an advertisement at Holiday Twin Drive In (below).





Early Childhood Educators during Provider Appreciation festivities in May. Heather Garcia from Heather's Little Stars Daycare (left top), Alecia Dillmann from Raising Daisies (top right) with Early Childhood Coach Taylor Ashby, and Teaching Tree Early Childhood Learning Center (bottom).

CURRENT ECCLC TEAM

Christina Taylor - CEO

Lauren Powers - Operations & Finance Director

Heather Blanco - Early Care & Education Director

Liz Means - Early Childhood Mental Health Director

Julie Grawe - Communications and
Development Director

Erin Amidon - Early Childhood Coach

Taylor Ashby - Early Childhood Coach

Corinna Crandall - Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

Letha Gillisse - Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

Christina Gomez - Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

Stacy Hart - Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant

Karly Kampe - Administrative Assistant

Logan Mansanarez - Early Childhood Coach

Annie Nay - Early Care & Education Program Associate

Heather Soderberg - Early Childhood Coach

Maya Turn - Early Childhood
Mental Health Program Associate

Early Childhood Council

of LARIMER COUNTY

Early Childhood Council of Larimer County (ECCLC) is an independent nonprofit organization that rallies support, resources, and awareness to ensure every young child in our community has quality early childhood experiences so they thrive from day one.

Whether in Estes Park or Wellington, Red Feather Lakes or Berthoud, every young child benefits from diverse, committed caregivers and engaged professionals in their lives. We know when this happens, children grow up healthier, happier, and ready for success in school and in life.

Early Childhood Council of Larimer County has been striving to dismantle systemic inequities and make this a reality in our community for decades. We work tirelessly and strategically together with everyone important in a young child's life, from parents to teachers, and from physicians to psychologists, to equitably modernize and prioritize early childhood experiences. We provide expert coaching and consultation, build leadership capacity, incubate innovative ideas, spearhead community collaboration, advocate for policies and funding, and design and pilot programs.

We only get one childhood. When every young child is cared for in an environment that invigorates their learning and supports their wellbeing, they are set up for a life of health and happiness, which elevates our entire community.

