

WINGS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER



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A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR:

SIENNA HUNTER

In the past year, Wings Early Childhood Center has experienced some wonderful yet challenging transformations. We have doubled our facility, welcoming many new staff members, including myself as the new Executive Director! We have responded to the need of infant care in our community, adding the only infant program in Pagosa. With our expansion, we also added a much-needed commercial kitchen. This has allowed us to further provide nourishing meals to the children attending Wings.

I have been part of the team here at Wings since May 2021 as a teacher and for the last 2 years as the Assistant Director. My predecessor, Becca, taught me an abundance in our 3 years working together. I feel equipped and motivated to lead Wings in this new chapter of our story. I have deep roots in this community, and nothing brings me more joy than pouring into the youngest members of our community and supporting their families.

As a non-profit center, serving all families regardless of their income, we could not meet families where they are without your generous support. We are truly grateful for your support.



Philosophy:

At Wings, we operate on the idea that all children are competent, curious, and creative individuals. By empowering their thoughts, questions, and interests, we will foster a lifelong love of learning. Our teachers are aware of each child's potential and have a mission to help further their growth by creating learning opportunities through real-life experiences that focus on their interests.

Mission:

Wings aims to deliver high-quality, inclusive, nature-based care and education to children ages 6 weeks - 5 years, to inspire learning through nature and to create life-long connections with themselves, others, and their world.



“In any given moment we have two options: to step forward into growth or step back into safety.”
~Abraham Maslow



What makes Wings unique?

At Wings, we separate ourselves from other childcare centers in our area through our approach to education. Our nontraditional pedagogy mixed between Reggio Emilia and nature-based education prioritizes spending as much time outside in child-directed activities as possible! While some may question if this is as beneficial as more traditional academic preschool programs, there is more and more research surfacing about the long-term positive effects of such approaches. The imprinting that children experience from their early care experiences will set them up for life "readiness" in more important "below the tip of the iceberg skills" such as broad vocabulary, curiosity, confidence, persistence, and self-control. (1) "Primary learners are at an age where learning capacity and brain development are at their peak, and nature has given them the drive to maximize that power with its best learning tool - play. It is no surprise that children prefer acting and interacting to listening passively. It's how they are designed." (2)

1: natureschoolcooperative.org/post/nature-play-is-learning-and-does-include-academics
2: eleducation.org/resources/characteristics-of-primary-learners

"Wings is an exceptional childcare facility that creates a fun and safe learning environment. The entire staff is amazing, and their ability to make not only my daughter, but each child, feel safe, loved, and special is unmatched. As a full-time working mom, I am so grateful for the peace of mind and comfort I have during my busy workdays knowing my child is being well taken care of. Our family loves Wings and highly recommends them!"

~Anissa Griego

"At Wings, my child is seen as an individual rather than just a developmental assessment and check box."

~PreK Parent

"All your staff have become a part of my village. What you all do for not only my little family but so much of this community does not ever go unnoticed."

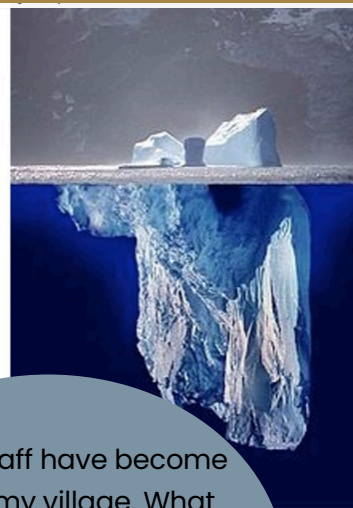
~Caitlyn Berry



following a recipe to create banana bread

"I love that my littles are encouraged to explore their world, and engage their personal interests at Wings, while they learn life skills such as problem solving, team work, and emotional regulation."

~parent of child attending Wings for 3 years!



Concrete skills:

Letters
Sounds
Numbers
("School Readiness")

Underlying skills:

Broad vocabulary
Interest in language
Curiosity
Persistence
Attentiveness
Incidental learning
Drive to learn
Predictability
Memory
Self control

NATURE-BASED CURRICULUM:

We care not only about the educational enrichment and daily needs of each child but also the needs of the families we serve. At Wings, we believe that learning should be presented by the students and nurtured by the teachers. Children need to develop their interests. This inspires a love for learning as they are encouraged to openly explore their environment. Children are often told what to do and how to do it, and instead, we present children with different materials and tools, observing and assisting as we watch their wheels turn.

Each classroom outlines specific monthly objectives and student goals based on their individual development. The daily activities incorporate natural materials, open-ended thinking, and enhance multiple developmental domains. Our goal is to create well-rounded children, who are competent in problem-solving and social skills, while also allowing them to experience the fleeting joys of childhood!

We also understand that learning cannot take place without a loving and caring environment. All Wings employees make it their priority to create trusting bonds with children to start the learning process.



Assessment Tools:

Assessment and observation of child development allow us to track learning and growth, while also identifying potential delays that children may be facing. The earlier we can identify delays, the earlier we can connect a child to the needed resources to help them thrive.

At Wings, we utilize a variety of assessment tools, including Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), The Colorado Early Learning & Development Guidelines, and High Scope. All of these tools allow us authentic, observations of children in their natural play environment.



Extracurricular:

We plan opportunities in our curriculum to expose children to a wide variety of experiences that build their understanding of how our society works together as a whole. One of the ways we do this is through volunteers. This past year, we had many visitors, bringing along the knowledge of their expertise. A few include:

- firefighters and police
- medical providers
- mail delivery workers
- librarians and authors
- musicians

“In nature, children learn to take risks, overcome fears, make new friends, regulate emotions and create imaginary worlds.”

~Angela Hanscom

Infant Care:

Wings was founded after the Early Childhood Education workgroup gathered research showing the vast need for childcare in our community. Since opening Wings, we have further realized the lack of infant care in Pagosa Springs. There are strict regulations when serving this vulnerable population, but we were determined to overcome these barriers and add an infant program to our center.

The infant room opened in October 2024, enrolling just over half of our capacity (5 infants), ages 6 weeks to 1 year old. Our waitlist currently has 13 infants. As we prepare to enroll more infants, we must first ensure we are fully staffed. Mrs. Bee is qualified as our Infant Supervisor and takes pride in the care of the babies we serve. We are excited to see this part of our program flourish as we partner with families in the growth of their tiny treasures!

"What an amazing staff with so much heart. Mrs. Bee, Miss JoJo, and Miss Brigid are lovely. We love how they engage and develop the infants. I see how all staff are committed to providing a safe, fun, and loving environment and we're very thankful for admin and the whole team at Wings. Keep doing what you do!"

~ Infant parent, Luz Ruiz

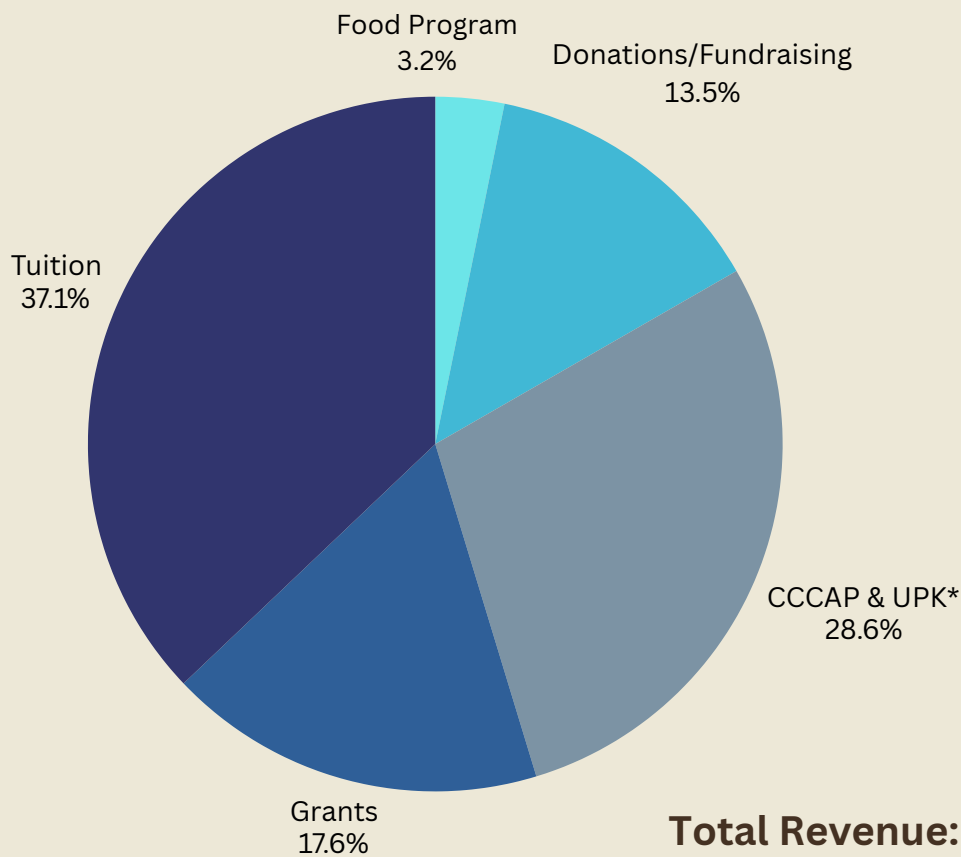


Nourishing the mind & body **JORDYN MARTINEZ**

"After almost 4 years of cooking for a center full of children using electric pots, pans, and skillets it has been an incredible change to cook in a real kitchen! While I was able to make it work with what we had, I am so excited to see what the food program at Wings will grow into now that we have a fully functional kitchen. The meals have always been nutritious, but now I have the equipment and space to make more homemade food for our little ones! With two kids of my own, I know how incredibly picky some children can be. I keep this in mind when planning the seasonal menu, including a wide variety of foods from different cultures. Children seeing their peers eat the foods served encourages them to try foods that they may not normally eat.

The early childhood years are paramount for development. Balanced, healthy meals aid in brain development, boost the immune system and support physical growth. These balanced meals are provided to all children at Wings, regardless of income. We are extremely thankful to provide these meals considering many children do not have access to healthy foods at home."

Fiscal Year 2023–2024



Revenue:

*CCCAP:

Colorado Child Care Assistance Program for families who have an income of 185% or less of the federal poverty level. We do not cap how many families we enroll who qualify for CCCAP as many centers do. The rate we are paid by those eligible for CCCAP lies between our level 2 and 3 subsidies. Over 1/3 of the children attending Wings are receiving CCCAP benefits.

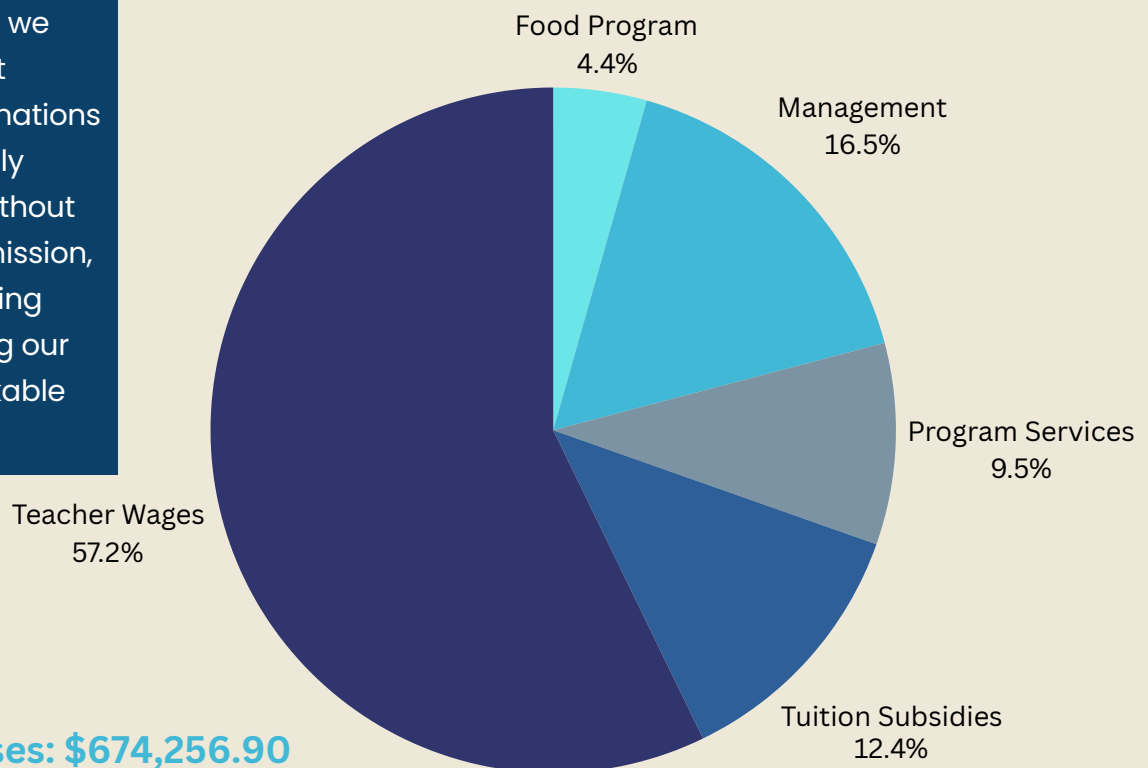
*UPK:

Universal Preschool - all children in Colorado can register for up to 15 hours of free, high-quality preschool in their year before kindergarten.

Total Revenue: \$772,316.08

Expenses:

Tuition alone does not cover our staff wages. For this reason, we must be successful at grant writing, fundraising, and donations from our supporters! We truly could not do what we do without you and your belief in our mission, which supports us in providing competitive wages, showing our appreciation for the remarkable work our teachers do!



Total Expenses: \$674,256.90

Valuing our Teachers:

As an organization, we are facing similar struggles as other employers in our area; retention of quality staff. We continue to offer competitive salaries and flexible schedules where we can, but the art of teaching young children can be draining; especially when facing frequent staff changes. A top priority at this time is improving staff retention. Our board will further consider our benefits package, discussing what additional benefits we can afford to offer our employees. Increase of pay and benefits was voiced in a recent employee survey as a main area of interest. Investing in staff benefits and competitive wages will further increase the quality of our program, and allow us to serve even more children in need of our services! Once we are fully staffed, Wings will be able to serve 92 children, compared to the current 67!



Unique Professional Development Opportunities:

Built into our yearly calendar are four professional development days. Each of these days focuses on a different part of our approach to learning; tools to teach emotional intelligence through self-regulation, safety and health, child development and assessment, and nature-based learning philosophies.

When possible, we bring in outside professionals to teach their expertise. Last May, Wings staff participated in a hike, given prompts to interact and learn from the environment as we hiked.

In June 2023, Wings staff attended a Conscious Discipline training at Fort Lewis College.

In 2024 and beyond, Wings plans to incorporate nature-based educational training that is offered in person. With our distinctive approach, many training opportunities are focused on traditional preschool teaching. We would like to lean into our uniqueness, and better train our staff to bring nature into their everyday teaching and interactions with the children we serve!





Goals for the upcoming year to build on our successes:

- continue to improve the quality of our program, reaching a 3 to 4 with the Colorado Shines rating system
- increase professional development opportunities, including nature-based training
- retain quality staff, allowing us to fully enroll and serve more children in the community
- facilitate a successful fundraising event



Our Dedicated Board of Directors:

- Lynne McCrudden - President
- James Garrett - Vice President
- Linda Williams - Secretary
- Steve Dayton - Treasurer
- Donna Mosher - Member, Editor
- Allen Roth - Member
- David Smith - Past President

Why invest in early childhood education?

“High-quality birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment, through better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment, which reduce long-term taxpayer costs and equip the country’s workforce for a competitive future, emerging as an effective way to break the cycle of poverty “

~The Heckman Equation

Wings is recognized by the IRS as a 501 c3 tax-exempt organization. Donations to Wings may reduce your taxable income and may qualify for a 50% credit toward your state income tax.

ARE YOU READY TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT?

Please return the enclosed card with your donation in the pre-addressed envelope, or scan the QR code to send a one-time donation or set up monthly donations!

