

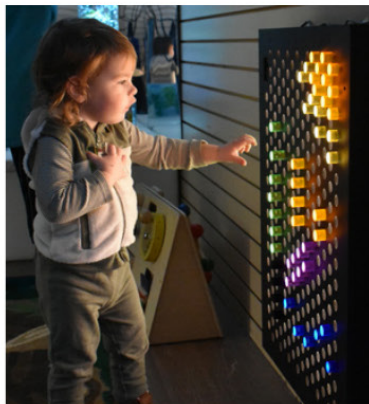
Connections Early Years Family Centre

# IMPACT REPORT

PLAY



GROW



& DISCOVER



# 2024

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

As we step into spring, a season of renewal and growth, I am honored to reflect on a year of incredible milestones and continued progress. This past year has been especially momentous for our organization, as we celebrated 50 years of service as a non-profit.

A highlight of this milestone was the completion of our newly renovated, fully accessible building. This renovation not only ensures accessibility for all, but also includes bilingual signage to better reflect our commitment to both of Canada's official languages. We are excited about the opportunities this space will provide as we continue to serve our community.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Krista Loughead for her outstanding leadership as Chair of our Board of Directors. Her guidance has shaped our organization over the years, and we are deeply thankful for her dedication.

As I step into this new role, I am excited to welcome Bianca Rubino as our new Vice Chair, and Marissa Krasowski, Jessica Sartori and Anit Maria Jose to our Board of Directors. Their passion and expertise will be invaluable as we continue our work.

This year, we were fortunate to have two successful fundraisers—our annual Trivia Night and Golf Tournament—that helped us complete our building project. Additionally, our Taylor Swift concert tickets raffle helped us end our Building Up campaign era. Thank you to all of our donors, volunteers and staff who made this possible.

As we look ahead, we are filled with optimism and excitement for the future. Much like the season of spring, we are blossoming into new opportunities.

Thank you for your continued support. I look forward to all we will accomplish together in the seasons ahead.



**Celeste Kurcz**  
Chair, Board of Directors

## Board of Directors

Celeste Kurcz, Chair  
Bianca Rubino, Vice-Chair  
Michael Hebert, Treasurer  
Andrea Catalano, Secretary

Natalie Beltrano  
Kathryn Corby  
Katrina Holland-Uttley  
Marissa Krasowski  
Dr. Krista Loughead  
Dr. Patti Millar  
Dr. Jessica Sartori  
Dr. Paula M. Van Wyk

Anit Maria Jose, Associate Board Member

Barb Brown, Executive Director

# OUR TEAM

Staff, volunteers, and students play a key role in the operations of the Centre and the services we are able to provide. Without the contribution of each of these individuals, we would not be able to provide the communities we serve with the standard of excellence our programs provide.

## Connections Staff

Executive Director - Barb Brown

Christie Antovski  
Ashleigh DeLisle  
Raquel De Mesa  
Sheila Devaney  
Kristy Estabalaya  
Sarah Fauteux  
Renee Fiacco  
Krysta Fuerth

Courtney Gibbons  
Sherry Gibson  
Alicia Graovac  
Jamie Hodgins  
Katelyn Jacques  
Altjenka Jakova  
Amy Lesperance  
Joan Moser

Juanita Nolf  
Monica Nowak  
Wendy Oakey  
Monica Overton  
Kathleen Parker  
Jillian Parker-Serio  
Amanda Phillips  
Adrijana Postic

Shannon Price  
Giovana Ribeiro  
Anne Rosete  
Selwana Sharara  
Elisa Simone  
Amy Taylor  
Eva Tsakalis  
Kelilah Uras



## Volunteers

Miriam Aboukamil  
Jared Aiken  
Mike Alexander  
Amira Atris  
Sabrina Batamuriza  
Natalie Beltrano  
Francesco Biondi  
Lauren Bricker  
Steve Brown  
Andrea Catalano  
Mukesh Chandarana  
Dallas Cooper  
Kathryn Corby  
Habon Curtis  
Dana DesRoisiers  
Rayane Ghandour

Katie Glos  
Ericka Greenham  
Kelly Grieves  
Emma Gruich  
Emma Hammond  
Tim Hampson  
Juan Han  
Mike Hebert  
Kate Holland-Uttley  
Bianca Hutton  
Nermin Ibrahim  
Alexandra Jackson  
Kawaljit Kaur  
Winnie Kisoka  
Monika Klich  
Marissa Krasowski

Supriya Kshirsagar  
Alisha Kumar  
Celeste Kurcz  
Mariam Lena  
Krista Loughhead  
Paula M. van Wyk  
Anit Maria Jose  
Devina Martinez  
Patti Millar  
Lama Mohammed  
Lauren Moreau  
Michelle Muzlai  
Michael Naismith  
Olivia Nelson  
Ngan Nguyen  
Kevin Nie

Rose Ogbonnaya-Ogburu  
Opeyemi Ogunniyi  
Seray Ozoglu  
Nayeli Rodriguez  
Bianca Rubino  
Jessica Sartori  
Ayesha Sayyeda  
Jesselin Schlender  
John Scobie  
Tasneem Sultana Sheik  
Adrienne Thomas  
Shara Truong  
Zoey Truong  
Jing Wang  
Jason Wong  
Tingting Xiang

## Placement Students

Farhin Alam  
Fizza Ali  
Bobby Blondin  
Alexis Costantin  
Stency Cyriac

Willeom DiPede  
Lena Glover  
Amal Hussein  
Deanna Impens  
Amna Khan

Emily Lyons  
Katarina Marjanovic  
Melissa Matera  
Cooky Montoya  
Nahrina Narsa

Makyla Ouellette  
Lorena Papac  
Karah Postil  
Melissa Quayle  
Maddie Raymont





# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY...

**In 2024, Connections celebrated two events – 50 years of service and the completion of a 5-year, 2.9-million-dollar renovation project that now makes our Centre accessible to all families. To honour these momentous occasions, we hosted a Community Open House and invited past and present families, community members, and agency partners.**

The past 50 years of service allowed us to meet the most amazing, resilient families who taught us how to support them. It makes our day when we run into past participants of our Centre and our programs and see how they have grown.

Over the years, many families have donated their time and talents to make this Centre the best place it could be, but it was inevitable that we had to address the aging building's structure. We took the plunge in 2018 and committed to our 5-year Building UP! Campaign to renovate the building and make it accessible for all families.

The Building UP! Campaign raised funds for improvements to the Centre's physical structure, ensuring an accessible and functional environment for all families. Since 2018, building renovations and energy-efficiency upgrades have included: an accessible main entrance and lobby, elevator, S.T.E.M. playroom, additional treatment and hearing screening rooms, a sensory space for young children, an accessible community kitchen, and so much more!

Now we get to continue serving this community for another 50 years in a more accessible, barrier free environment.



# Thanks to you, we passed the finish line of our **\$2.9 million** Building UP! Campaign...

We absolutely could not have completed these necessary renovations to our Centre without the commitment and strength of this community and some very special people and groups.



Government of Canada    Gouvernement du Canada

**Canada**

Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario



**SOLCZ FAMILY  
FOUNDATION**



# PLAY isn't just about fun — it's learning too.

**When playing, children explore their world and build critical skills that bring a lifetime of benefits. Play underpins everything we do at Connections, and our space is welcoming and accessible with something for every family and their young children.**

Play is the foundation of all our programming and services. Play is how children learn. It is simple, creative, unplanned, rewarding, and doesn't need to have a specific goal. Play helps children of all ages learn, develop, explore, and be healthy. Play allows children to express their emotions, learn self-regulation, develop language skills and pro-social behaviours, and grow at their own pace.

Our space and selection of toys and activities are specifically designed to support age-appropriate learning and development through play.

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## EarlyON Child and Family Centre

Connections EarlyON Centre is centered on family support; we are focused on not only a child's development, but on the needs of the entire family. At the Connections EarlyON we offer a wide variety of programming that children and their parents and caregivers can access. This includes: Come and Play drop-in sessions, dedicated programming for families with newborns and infants, outdoor learning, parenting groups, early learning programming, and special events presented by the Connections Dads Activities Committee.

We have spent the last 50 years lovingly cultivating our space for families to enjoy. Our EarlyON consists of 4 distinct rooms – the main playroom, a S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) room, a sensory room, a creative room – and an outdoor space. Children are free to move about activities and to use their imagination. All families are encouraged to explore materials, use toys, and engage with their peers.





## Be Back Soon

Be Back Soon offers flexible, short-term unlicensed childcare for young children at no cost. This vital service provides qualifying parents or caregivers care for their children for short periods of time so they can attend appointments and access other services.



Connections has run this service for 19 years, serving newcomers, parents experiencing intimate partner violence, parents facing difficult changes in their circumstances or employment, or parents looking to access other services that will create stable conditions for their families.

Attending job interviews, accessing legal or social services, counselling appointments, medical appointments, or training is possible because Be Back Soon provides flexible, short-term childcare needed at no cost, so parents and caregivers have one less thing to worry about.

Numerous success stories have emerged of parents gaining employment, regaining their health, or being able to provide stable environments for their children in times of transition, all because they were able to rely on the childcare we provide their children.





# GROW and learn about your child's development.

**Big change starts small – during the first 6 years your child's brain develops faster than at any other time; it's when the building blocks are established.**

Connections provides early identification and intervention services to advance the healthy development of families and their children 0 – 6 years. Our programs are at no cost and can be accessed at any time.

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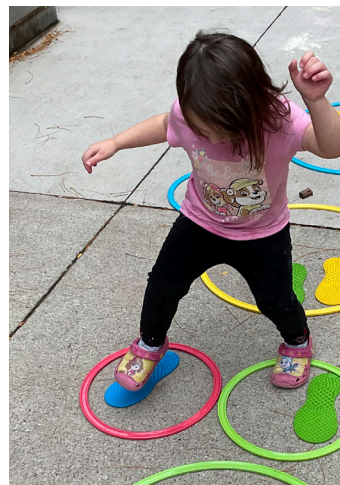
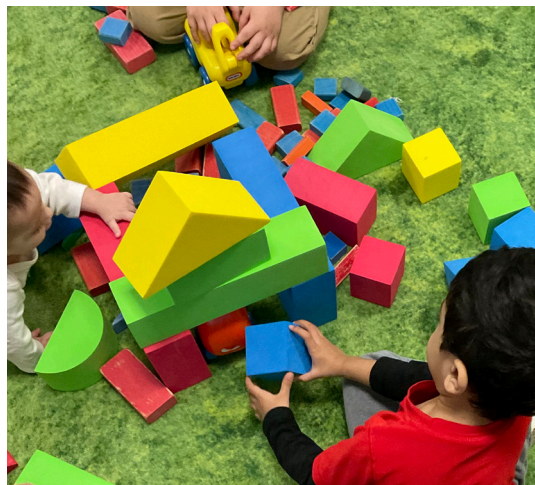
## Talk 2 Me Preschool Speech and Language

Talk 2 Me provides family-focused resources and programs for children with speech and language concerns from birth until school entry. Our staff works with parents and caregivers to help every child develop their communication skills, giving them the best opportunity for healthy development.

We are here to support the entire family through any speech and language difficulties, and the earlier they are identified, the greater the impact of our intervention.

## Infant Hearing

The Infant Hearing Program offers universal newborn hearing screening, high-risk monitoring, and services for children identified with permanent hearing loss in Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent. We offer newborn screening, audiology services, family support, and communication development services.





## Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention

Connections Early Years Family Centre is the lead agency for the Essex-Kent Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention Program. This program provides family support, consultation, and intervention services for families with children who are blind or have low vision from birth to school entry.

The goal of the program is to help the caregivers of children with visual concerns gain knowledge about their child's learning style, allowing them to support their child's early development. Our services can take place in your child's home, in their childcare, or other community settings.

## W.E.R.E.C.E. Mentorship Program

The intention of the Windsor-Essex Registered Early Childhood Educator Mentorship Program is to provide opportunities to engage with a supportive community and to intentionally improve capacity through goal-based individual and peer learning.

Participants, who are early years professionals working in Windsor-Essex or ECE students, are paired with one or more other participants based on stated professional goals. Through mentorship, communities are formed and intentional space for reflective practice is created.







# DISCOVER

## opportunities for responsive caregiving.



**Nurtured children are the consequence of nurturing adults: to invest in children means also investing in the people around them – the parents, caregivers, grandparents, early years workforce, volunteers and more.**

Connections is a place to feel belonging, community, and connection. We offer parenting groups for coping with stressful times, resources for early development, and opportunities for connecting with other parents and caregivers.

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### Ontario Autism Program - Caregiver Mediated Early Years

In partnership, the Caregiver-Mediated Early Years programs help young children learn new skills and meet individual goals. All programs are play-based, child-led and developmentally appropriate. Programs are free of charge and available for a period of up to six months per child.

Through these programs, parents and caregivers can learn therapeutic strategies and specific techniques from professionals based on their child's individual needs. The programs aim to build the family's capacity to support their child's skill development in social interaction, play, communication, emotional and adaptive development, and self-help skills.





## Parenting Groups

Parenting groups are scheduled, structured gatherings of parents and caregivers experiencing similar moments in their children's lives. Our groups are themed, covering topics from positive parenting to going to school to child development and self-regulation. Every group is a blend of evidence-based parenting strategies and a space for parents to share their own knowledge and experiences.

## Outdoor Learning

Connections' outdoor space, The Good Friends Garden ~ Kitigan mino inawediwin, is for open-ended, self-directed discovery and play. Children can explore the natural world through all their senses and learn how it works in deeply engaging ways. This shared space was created with our neighbours, the Aboriginal Child Resource Centre, to show children how the natural world works and how they fit within it. We invite guest speakers and experts from all over the county to help us explore different in parts of nature.

Our staff fills the garden with different materials and activities on a daily basis. This space allow children to engage in dramatic play such as being explorers, scientists, and all manner of bugs and animals. All our theme days are interactive and help children and their parents and caregivers to talk more with each other about the world around them.

# FUNDING & DONATIONS

## Program Financial Information

	2024
Ministry of Children, Community, & Social Services	\$ 2,384,765
Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention	
Ontario Autism Program - Caregiver Mediated Early Years	
Preschool Speech and Language	
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario	138,819
Infant Hearing	
Federal Employment Program	15,481
City of Windsor	521,056
EarlyON Centre	
W.E.R.E.C.E Mentorship Program	
Fundraising & Donations	74,166
Other Income	228,206
	\$ 3,362,493

## Donations

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we raised **\$18,327** in donations for our Centre. These funds contributed to the completion of our Building UP! renovation project.

Mike Alexander	Greater Essex County ETFO	Optimist Club of Forest Glade	Bradford Taylor
Dave and Trish Andrews	Knights of Columbus 2775	Missy Parker	Antonella Travo
Andrea Catalano	Knights of Columbus 8919	Val and Bill Reid	Don Wiley
Terri Cooper	Marissa Krasowski	Rotary Club of Windsor-Roseland	Windsor Firefighters Benefit Fund
Chevaliers de Colomb 8682	May Court Club of Windsor	Royal Canadian Legion 201	Windsor Volunteers for Literacy
Circle of Seven	Pat McTaggart	Royal Canadian Legion 255	WMM Construction
Congregation of Sisters of One St. Joseph	Michael Naismith	Bianca Rubino	Zeta Kappa Sorority
Austin Dowhan	Joshua Ollett	Sheet Metal Workers Local 235	
Linda Edwards	OPSEU Local 170	The Giving Eight Community	

## 2024 Grant Contributors



Employment and  
Social Development Canada



CONGREGATION OF THE  
Sisters of St. Joseph  
IN CANADA



Canada



The Catherine and Maxwell  
MEIGHEN FOUNDATION



SOLCZ FAMILY  
FOUNDATION



TOLDO  
Foundation



Ontario  
Trillium  
Foundation



Fondation  
Trillium  
de l'Ontario



hydro  
one



W.E. CARE  
OF KIDS  
WINDSOR ESSEX CARE  
FOR KIDS FOUNDATION

# FUNDRAISING

## Trivia Night

On February 9th, 2024, Connections' 14th Annual Trivia Night was held, raising over **\$10,400** for our Centre.

The evening was especially exciting with the draw of our Taylor Swift ticket raffle being held in conjunction with Trivia Night, raising an additional **\$12,532**.



### Event Sponsors

Dr. Krista Loughhead, ND

Oscar Construction Company Ltd.

Bradford Taylor, CPA

Media Street Productions

Dave and Trish Andrews

Kathryn Corby

Generator Design

Halpenny Insurance Brokers Ltd.

Martindale Window and Door Inc.

Merchants Paper Company Ltd.

Monarch Business Products

Bianca Rubino

## Golf Tournament

On August 12th, 2024, the 13th Annual Charity Golf Event was held and raised **\$12,915**.

### Event Sponsors

Dr. Krista Loughhead, ND

WMM Construction Services Inc.

UNIFOR Local 444

Oscar Construction Company Ltd.

UNIFOR Local 2458

Di Maio Design Associates Architecture

Circle of 7

St. Clair College Alumni Association

AM800

Bradford Taylor, CPA

Canadian Tire Gas Bar

Colautti Brothers Marble, Tile, & Carpet

FSEAP

Kipping Tire & Automotive

Made to Shade

MC Business Solutions

Motor City Community Credit Union

Parkway Family Dental

Rob Gruich, Royal LePage Binder Real Estate

Roth Mosey CPAs & Business Advisors

Young Electric

## GivingTuesday

With the community's support and the generosity of our matching partner, Rene Roy Group Inc, we met and exceeded our GivingTuesday fundraising goal. A total of **\$2,600** was raised to support and sustain Be Back Soon so we can continue to offer this meaningful service.

GIVING  
TUESDAY



Thank you to all of our dedicated trivia teams and golfers for supporting us year after year!

**In 2024, the Board of Directors committed to continue to offer the Be Back Soon service without dedicated, ongoing funding. Moving forward, all fundraising proceeds go towards supporting Be Back Soon.**

We welcome **all** donations that can help us continue to provide meaningful support for families who need it.



# THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

At Connections, establishing connections and partnerships with other community agencies to help families access services and maximize the resources available is a priority.

Aboriginal Child Resource Centre  
ACCESS County Community Support Services  
Algonquin College  
Arbor Memorial  
Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario  
Building Blocks for Better Babies  
Canadian Hearing Society  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
Care for Newcomer Children (CNC) Advisory Committee  
Children First  
Children's Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent

City of Windsor Children's Services  
Collège Boréal  
College of Early Childhood Educators  
Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence  
Conseil Scolaire Viamonde  
Discovery School Based Child Care  
Drouillard Place  
Dr. Todd Loughead, University of Windsor  
EarlyON Child and Family Centres Network  
Erie Shores Healthcare  
Family Services Windsor-Essex  
Fantastic Fathers  
Franco-Sol Garderie et Centre de Ressources  
Great Beginnings Child Centred Cooperative  
Greater Essex County District School Board  
Healthy Babies, Healthy Children  
Hiatus House  
Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare  
John McGivney Children's Centre  
Loyalist College  
Midwives of Windsor  
Midwifery Collective of Essex County  
Multicultural Council of Windsor & Essex County  
Natural Pathways Forest and Nature School  
New Canadians' Centre of Excellence  
Nisa Homes

Ojibway Park and Nature Centre  
Ready, Set, Go Windsor  
Regional Children's Centre  
Seneca College  
Ska:Na Family Learning Centre  
South Essex Community Council  
St. Clair College  
Story Book Early Learning Centre  
Summit Centre for Preschool Children with Autism  
The Downtown Mission & Windsor Youth Centre  
The Windsor Express  
University of Windsor  
University of Windsor's MusicBox Children's Charity  
Welcome Centre  
W.E.S.T. (Women's Enterprise Skills Training)  
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board  
Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society  
Windsor-Essex Child/Youth Advocacy Centre  
Windsor-Essex Community Health Centre  
Windsor-Essex County Health Unit  
Windsor-Essex Local Immigration Partnership  
Windsor Public Library  
Windsor Volunteers for Literacy  
Windsor Regional Hospital  
Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women  
YMCA of Southern Ontario



# CONNECTIONS EARLY YEARS FAMILY CENTRE'S 2024 AT A GLANCE



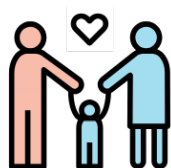
**22,150**  
**Children & Adults Served**



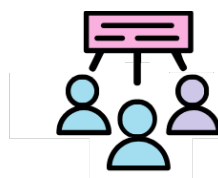
**7**  
PROGRAMS, INCLUDING  
IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL CARE



**114**  
PARTICIPANTS IN THE  
W.E.R.E.C.E. PROGRAM



**11,216**  
FAMILY VISITS TO THE  
EARLYON CENTRE



**360**  
PARENTS ATTENDED  
PARENTING GROUPS

**2,285**

CHILDREN SERVED  
BY TALK 2 ME

**33**

CHILDREN SUPPORTED  
THROUGH  
BLIND-LOW VISION

**4,871**

INFANT HEARING  
SCREENINGS

**1,068**

TIMES THAT  
PARENTS USED  
BE BACK SOON



# Connections

Early Years Family Centre