

Connections Early Years Family Centre

IMPACT REPORT



2025

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Spring is often a time of renewal, reflection, and change—a season that invites us to look back on our growth while also looking ahead to what's next. This year Connections Early Years Family Centre embodied all of these themes. Over the past year, Connections has experienced continued growth, stability, and meaningful impact within our community. Our annual fundraising events, including Trivia Night and the Golf Tournament, once again brought families, partners, and supporters together while generating important funds to sustain our programs, services, and building.

This year also marked several significant milestones for our organization. We established an endowment fund, helping to secure the long-term financial sustainability of the Centre. In addition, we successfully paid off our mortgage—an achievement that reflects years of thoughtful planning and strong governance. We were also able to secure funding for our Be Back Soon program, ensuring for another year, that this essential service remains accessible to families who rely on it.

Recognizing the importance of sharing our story, we launched a Community Awareness Committee. This group is dedicated to documenting and highlighting the incredible work taking place within our Centre. Through this process, it has become even more evident that Connections has built a strong and respected reputation within the non-profit sector.

Our leadership and impact were further recognized this year, as Barb and Alicia were featured in an article connected to the Ontario Mentorship Collaborative symposium. This acknowledgment reflects the strength, knowledge, and leadership that continues to guide our organization. As we look to the future, we are focused on expanding our reach and building stronger connections within the for-profit sector. Broadening our network will be key to increasing awareness, diversifying funding opportunities, and ensuring the continued sustainability of our programs.

This year also brings moments of transition. We extend our sincere thanks to Anit and Ashley, who will be stepping away from the board. Their knowledge, contributions, and dedication were greatly valued. They will be missed.

On a personal note, as I step away from my role as Board President, I do so with immense pride and gratitude. It has been an honour to serve this organization as a Board Member, Vice Chair, and President. Connections holds a very special place in my heart, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of a community that truly makes a difference in the lives of families.

Connections is more than a Centre, it is a support system, a place of belonging, and a community that stays with you long after you leave.

Thank you to our dedicated staff, committed board members, and the entire community for your continued support and belief in the work we do.



Celeste Kurcz
Chair, Board of Directors

Board of Directors

Celeste Kurcz, Chair
Katrina Holland-Uttley, Vice-Chair
Michael Hebert, Treasurer
Andrea Catalano, Secretary

Kathryn Corby
Ashley Harmon
Anit Maria Jose
Marissa Krasowski
Dr. Krista Loughhead
Dr. Jessica Sartori
Dr. Paula M. Van Wyk
Leigh Vachon

Barb Brown, Executive Director

CONNECTIONS EARLY YEARS FAMILY CENTRE 2025 AT A GLANCE



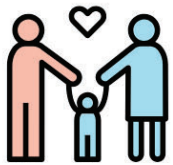
23,400
Children & Adults Served



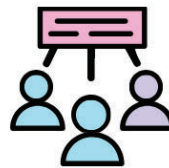
7
**PROGRAMS, INCLUDING
IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL CARE**



52
**PARTICIPANTS IN THE
W.E.R.E.C.E. PROGRAM**



13,802
**FAMILY VISITS TO THE
EARLYON CENTRE**



260
**PARENTS ATTENDED
PARENTING GROUPS**

3,637

CHILDREN SERVED
BY TALK 2 ME

28

CHILDREN SUPPORTED
THROUGH
BLIND-LOW VISION

4,596

INFANT HEARING
SCREENINGS

1,048

TIMES THAT
PARENTS USED
BE BACK SOON

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.

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.

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 20 years, serving newcomers, parents experiencing intimate partner violence, facing difficult changes in their circumstances or employment, or 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 the flexible, short-term childcare needed.

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.

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 learning how to play to going to school to child development and self-regulation.

Each group is a blend of evidence-based parenting strategies and a space for parents to share their own knowledge and experiences. In addition to parenting groups, we also run programs designed for parent-child interactions. In a different setting from home, participants get to play and spend time with their child without the distractions of screens or everyday life.

EarlyON Child and Family Centre

Connections' EarlyON consists of 4 distinct rooms – the main playroom, a S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math) room, a sensory room, a creative room – and an outdoor discovery space.

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



S.T.E.M. ROOM



SENSORY ROOM



CREATIVE ROOM

Our 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. 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 (CDAC).

Speaking of CDAC, thanks to a grant provided by the May Court Club of Windsor, the committee was able to provide two special events for families. Over the summer, CDAC hosted the first event, a Family Game Night that included a sit-down dinner. At the end of the evening, each family chose a board game to take with them, so they can continue the fun at home.

This grant also allowed CDAC to host their annual Fall Family Walk, which is beloved by families that continue to visit the Centre year after year.



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.

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.

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.

Over the last two years, WE Care for Kids Foundation assisted us in purchasing tactile and light-up sensory toys to support the children and families using this service. Our Early Childhood Vision Consultants consistently use and rely on these materials during home and community sessions with children from birth to school entry. They provide engaging visual stimulation that enhances attention, supports visual development, promotes tactile exploration, and encourages meaningful sensory experiences. In addition to using these items directly in intervention sessions, we have recently established a lending library for families to continue using the sensory materials between visits.



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.

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.

In 2025, WE Care for Kids Foundation provided support that allowed us to increase the number of hearing aids available through our Loaner Hearing Aid Service. This service is meant to assist families to get their children, who were diagnosed with a permanent hearing loss, timely access to appropriate amplification.

Once a hearing loss is diagnosed, families may experience delays in purchasing hearing aids. These hearing aids will be used as loaner devices to fill the gap between diagnosis and permanent hearing solutions for families.



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 resources for early development, and opportunities for connecting with other parents and caregivers.

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 space for reflective practice is created.

After four rounds, the Mentorship Hub continues to provide past and current Mentorship Program participants access to resources and materials to support their practice. In 2025, over 550 loans were completed, with additional supports provided through the Hub—including access to a makerspace and materials, CPL (Continuous Professional Learning) coaching, and ECE career way-finding.





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 parts of nature.

Our staff fills the garden with different materials and activities on a daily basis. This space allows children to engage in dramatic play and explore all types 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.

In 2025, thanks to support we received from the Congregation of Sisters of St. Joseph, we were successful in providing new experiences for parents and children to come together and create, interact and learn. B.A.B.Y. Group in the Park! is a new program that provides our community access to a unique opportunity for parents to interact with their babies while learning important child development information in an informal, social environment.

This funding also allowed us to expand upon a program we run each summer, Weather Wonders. We introduced new equipment that provided families with the opportunity to explore, read, play, invent, build, and learn all about climate and weather together.

FUNDING & DONATIONS

Program Financial Information

	2025
Ministry of Children, Community, & Social Services	\$ 1,960,368
Blind-Low Vision Early Intervention	
Ontario Autism Program - Caregiver Mediated Early Years	
Preschool Speech and Language	555,284
Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario	
Infant Hearing	
Federal Employment Program	5,364
City of Windsor	311,689
EarlyON Centre	
W.E.R.E.C.E Mentorship Program	
Fundraising & Donations	60,265
Other Income	106,043
	\$ 2,519,940

Donations

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, we raised **\$31,824** in donations for our Centre. These funds contributed to the completion of our Building UP! renovation project.

Dave and Trish Andrews	Michael Graovac	Audra Macintyre	Sheet Metal Workers Local 235
Andrea Catalano	Knights of Columbus 2775	Pat McTaggart	Mabel St. Louis
Terri Cooper	Knights of Columbus 8919	Oscar Construction Company Ltd.	Sam Suntres
Chevaliers de Colomb 8682	Knights of Columbus 9671	Phil Paolini	G. Douglas Vaisey
Circle of Seven	Marissa Krasowski	Reaching for the Stars Optimist Club	Don Wiley
Sheila Devaney	Celeste Kurcz	Val and Bill Reid	WMM Construction
Linda Edwards	Marjorie and Jim Laughton	Rotary Club of Windsor-Roseland	Zeta Kappa Sorority
Natasha Feghali	M@ Technologies	Royal Canadian Legion 201	

2025 Grant Contributors



Employment and
Social Development Canada

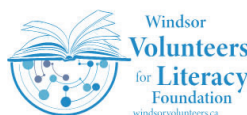


Canada

The Catherine and Maxwell
MEIGHEN FOUNDATION



MAY COURT CLUB
OF WINDSOR



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

FUNDRAISING

Trivia Night

On February 7th, 2025, Connections' 15th Annual Trivia Night was held, raising over **\$8,800** for our Centre.

Event Sponsors

Media Street Productions
Bradford Taylor, CPA
Motor City Community Credit Union
Dave and Trish Andrews

Chris Del Greco
Dr. Mark Olivito & Associates
Martindale Window and Door Inc.
Merchants Paper Company Ltd.

Celeste Kurcz
Rent and Snap
Remo Valente Real Estate
Your Windsor Dental Care



Golf Tournament

On August 9th, 2025, the 14th Annual Charity Golf Event was held and raised **\$12,915**.

Event Sponsors

Dr. Krista Loughhead, ND
WMM Construction Services Inc.
Bradford Taylor, CPA
Di Maio Design Associates Architecture
M@ Technologies
St. Clair Alumni Association
Bell Media
Kathryn Corby
Colautti Brothers Marble, Tile, & Carpet
FSEAP

Celeste Kurcz
MC Business Solutions
Parallel 42 Systems
Rob Gruich, Royal LePage Binder Real Estate
Roth Mosey CPAs & Business Advisors
UNIFOR Local 2458
Windsor-Essex County Association of Realtors
Windsor Chapel
Young Electric



GivingTuesday

With the community's support and the generosity of our matching partner, Oscar Construction, we met and exceeded our GivingTuesday fundraising goal. A total of **\$2,000** 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 will 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 PARTNERS

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

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

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

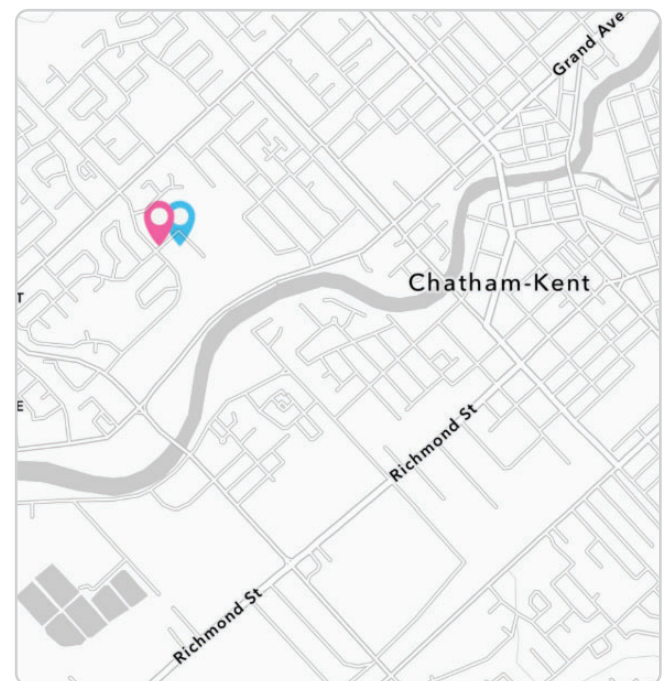
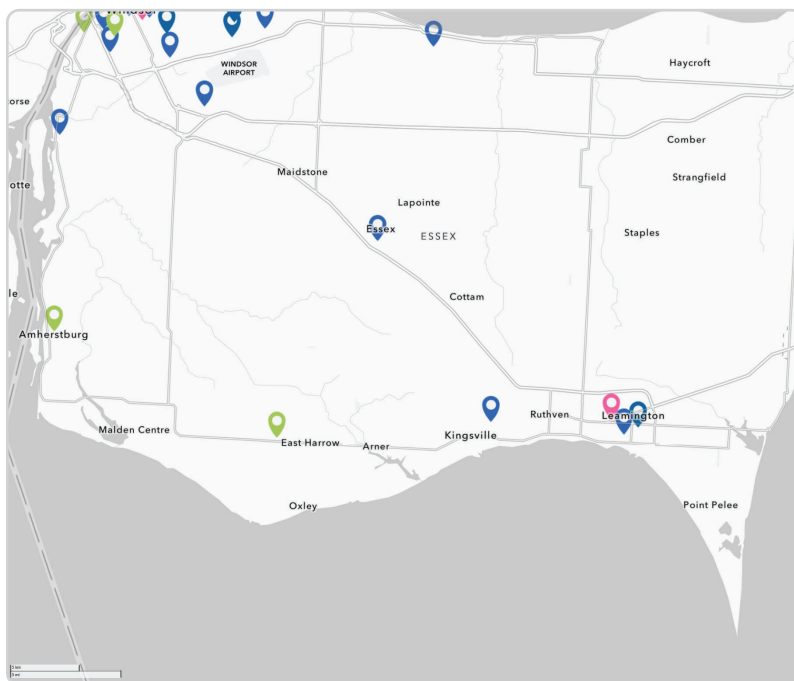
Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women

YMCA of Southern Ontario



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

To ensure we are accessible to the Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent community, we continue to provide our services at a variety of community sites and clinics across the county.



-  Talk 2 Me Community Sites
-  Talk 2 Me Clinics
-  Infant Hearing Screening Clinics
-  Blind-Low Vision Community Sites

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
Nolan Lofthouse
Emily Lyons
Joan Moser

Juanita Nolff
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

Nusrat Aka
Fatima Alawar
Fizza Ali
Hanin Al Saleh
Zeinab Alabidi
Zainab Alawar
Mariam Albashar
Mike Alexander
Zeinab Ammar
Amira Atris
Sabrina Batamuriza
Parth Bhati
Steve Brown
Sarah Brown
Irene Aiyun Cai
Leyla Çavdar

Xia Sophia Chen
Xi Sissy Chen
Chujun (Cara) Deng
Emma Ducharme
Amara Emokai
Felicia Evbodaghe
Colleen Faubert
Christine Gharib
Jasmine Guevara
Urviben Himmatbhai Gurjar
Delaney Hall
Tim Hampson
Kimberly Horton
Avril Johnson
Winny Kisoka
Monika Klich

Rebecca Kozora
Alisha Kumar
Wenjing Tracy Mao
Sofia Martinez
Sarah Metcalf
Lama Mohammed
Lauren Moreau
Janet Morton
Naitore (Cynthia) Muriithi
Michelle Muzslai
Mike Naismith
Mahsheed Noor Nini
Opeyemi Ogunniyi
Mariabelle Okoko
Kylie Pazner
Marley Pazner

Arishia Phatra
Nur Quomariah
Goutham Ramesh
Kaitlyn Reinhart
Kaye Reotutar
Logan Rivait
Avery Robinson
John Scobie
Nicole Smoter
Lea Tracy
Safak Ünal
Jing Wang
Berbarah Qas Yonan
Karolin Zaya

Placement Students

Olivia Bourque-Derochie
River Derby-Labute
Sofia Dzugan
Pinky Galagate
Madison Gray-Lauzon
Malinda Gushue

Zahraa Hassan
Katharine Heighway
Tala Hossami
Grace Howson
Deena Ismail
Noora Jazrawy

Nour Kassem
Aubrey Labute
Erica Latino
Tamara Miladinovic
Cooky Montoya
Rita Motyovszki

Blake Sharpe
Kyle Stanley
Koren Stewart
Nadia Wright





Connections

Early Years Family Centre

