



# Community Learning Report: Chaffee County

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EARLY MILESTONES  
COLORADO

[earlymilestones.org/launch-together](http://earlymilestones.org/launch-together)

# About the Initiative

**LAUNCH Together** is a unique partnership between Early Milestones, eight Colorado-based foundations, the Butler Institute for Families, and communities throughout the state. The initiative is designed to improve social-emotional and developmental outcomes for Colorado's young children and families, support system-level collaboration, and reduce mental health disparities among vulnerable populations.

For more information about the history and implementation of LAUNCH Together in Colorado, visit [earlymilestones.org/launch-together](http://earlymilestones.org/launch-together).



# About the Community

Chaffee County covers 1,000 square miles and has three population centers: Buena Vista, Poncha Springs, and Salida. The largest employers are the regional hospital, the prison, and government offices. Many service sector jobs are seasonal with low wages and no benefits, often requiring people to have multiple jobs in order to overcome Chaffee's high cost of living. Due to its rural setting, Chaffee's families lack access to many early childhood programs and services common in urban areas. Through LAUNCH Together, the Chaffee County Early Childhood Council (the Council), along with the early childhood council in neighboring Fremont County, led efforts to address regional equity challenges by increasing program and service availability.

**To learn more about LAUNCH Together Chaffee, please contact Janine Pryor, Chaffee County Early Childhood Council: [jpryor@ccecc.org](mailto:jpryor@ccecc.org) or 719.221.5114.**

## LAUNCH Together Chaffee Partners

Chaffee County Early Childhood Council  
Chaffee County Department of Public Health  
Buena Vista School District  
Salida School District  
Salida Pregnancy Resource Center  
Buena Vista Pregnancy Center  
First Street Family Health

Nurse Family Partnership  
Little Tykes Homestead  
Heart of the Rockies Regional Medical Center  
Solvista Health  
Children's Discovery Ranch  
The Grove Preschool  
Busy Bees Preschool

# Community in Action

## **Mental Health Consultation in Early Care & Education**

Kid Connects, an early childhood mental health (ECMH) consultation model, is fully embedded in three early care and education (ECE) sites and underway in two more. The mental health clinicians serving in ECE are now highly trained in Infant mental health and ECMH: four have completed the Harris Program Fellowship, 57 professionals from 33 agencies received introductory training in Diagnostic Classification for ages 0-5, and two clinicians completed an intensive certification in child parent psychotherapy.

## **Screening & Assessment**

LAUNCH Together Chaffee partners expanded and strengthened the infrastructure for developmental and social-emotional screening. All medical clinics in Chaffee County now provide pregnancy related mental health screening and referral services, as well as conduct developmental and social emotional screenings of young children. The Buena Vista School District also now provides early childhood care navigation services for families, whether or not children qualify through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

## **Behavioral Health in Primary Care**

An ECMH clinician was recruited, trained and integrated into First Street Family Health and the practice is committed to sustaining the position and expanding it to cover all ages. Valley-Wide Health System's Buena Vista clinic opened in October 2020 with a mental health clinician as part of the health care team. The mental health clinicians from both clinics completed specialized training in delivering integrated care.

After a community-wide survey revealed that professionals serving young children, including health care providers, want direct access to ECMH clinicians, a local warmline was established to meet this need.

## **Family Strengthening**

Evidence-based parenting curricula increased from one to four options, with at least one curriculum now used by 11 agencies. Seedlings, Circle of Security, Your Journey Together, and Conscious Discipline are now available in Chaffee County. Parents and caregivers have access to classes throughout the year and the curricula and programs respond to local needs.

## **Enhanced Home Visiting**

The Chaffee Public Health Director completed reflective supervision training and integrated the practice into the home visiting program. Home visitors from across the county completed various cross-domain trainings, and all home visiting programs now utilize reflective practice and have access to ECMH consultants.

## **STORY OF IMPACT**

The staff at our center are loving Conscious Discipline. Thanks to the support from the Council and Launch Together, we are weaving it into our daily practice. It is inspiring to see the difference it makes. Before the program, we had a child who was having many difficulties. Now, this child has become the "ambassador" of Conscious Discipline by sharing the calming techniques with the other 3-year-olds when he sees they are in need.

# Local Lessons



## **EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCILS ARE VEHICLES FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE.**

When given the funding and time to tackle systemic challenges, early childhood councils are able to identify and imbed the solutions needed to achieve sustainable success.



## **IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS EARLY.**

Identifying agency-based champions early in the process is essential to successful implementation of sustainable solutions.



## **A REGIONAL APPROACH STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS.**

The early childhood councils in Chaffee and Fremont counties approached LAUNCH Together as a regional effort. A history of working together to promote social-emotional knowledge and services was a solid foundation to build upon during and throughout this initiative.



## **INVESTING IN THE LOCAL WORKFORCE IS ESSENTIAL.**

It is critical to offer ongoing professional development focused on strengthening families and promoting healthy social-emotional development to ensure young children benefit from nurturing experiences and have the foundation for lifelong learning and health.

# Next Steps

**Identify and access resources and funding to support system building.** Community partners will continue to collaboratively respond quickly and effectively to system building opportunities, as well as crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Establish trauma responsive agencies.** LAUNCH Together prompted a desire among local agencies for trauma responsive practices. An implementation plan that was interrupted by the pandemic has resumed.

**Support integrated behavioral health.** Recruit site-based champions and subject matter experts to support two additional primary care clinics in the implementation of integrated behavioral health practices.

**Expand mental health consultation.** Implementation of Kid Connects will continue in the current two ECE sites and opportunities will be sought to expand the program into additional sites.

**Grow our own.** Collaboration among local school districts, the community college, and community partners will continue to recruit and develop early childhood professionals to support local needs.

# Initiative Funders



The Colorado Health Foundation™

