



Their beginning. Our future.

## Voices from the Field

My daughter, Hanna, deserves much of the credit for steering me in the direction of early childhood education. She was 3 years old, and I was in my senior year at Western State University in Gunnison, Colorado, finishing my bachelor's degree in Art and Design. An opportunity arose for me to assist the Art teacher at her preschool in Crested Butte. I quickly realized that I really loved working with preschool-age children, especially being able to provide them with lots of creative experiences. I was soon offered a teaching position at her school, and under the mentorship of several amazing teachers, I began a new journey in educating young children.

Over the years I've had the privilege of working with hundreds of wonderful children and families in Crested Butte, Oahu, Hawaii, and now in Salida. I've taken many, many Early Childhood Education classes and professional development training over the years earning credentials and certifications as Director and Lead Teacher. The next part of my journey will include becoming a certified ECE Coach and mentor.

When my family and I moved to Salida in 2004, I quickly became aware of the need for more high-quality preschool options for local children and families, and Two's Early Learning was born! What began almost 20 years ago as a very small program for just 2-year-olds has evolved into a large, center-based program with 50 enrolled families and children, licensed for ages 2- 8 years.

The 2015 expansion and relocation to the beautiful, historic Hutchinson Ranch gave the school, now known as Children's Discovery Ranch, an incredible opportunity to combine its creative roots with a play and nature-based exploratory environment. This move would not have been possible without tremendous community support, the willingness and generosity of the Hutchinson Family in sharing their beautiful land and heritage with our school, and the in-kind and financial assistance from many, many people, and local organizations. Through lots of hard work, commitment, and dedication from the CDR staff, current, and former families, and community partners, we've watched our vision of creating a program that offers young children an exceptional play and nature-based early learning experience become a reality. We are extremely proud to know that these experiences will have a lasting, positive impact on the growth and development of the children in our care as well as providing our families and employees with a strong sense of belonging to a collaborative school culture and community. It is our hope to be able to expand our program in the future to welcome more children and families to the Children's Discovery Ranch experience!

I feel truly blessed to have played an important role in the lives of so many children in their early years and I am incredibly grateful for the teachers of CDR who give so much of themselves to love and care for each child and make our school a truly unique place.



Their beginning. Our future.

Kathi Wardlow  
Founder/Director  
Children's Discovery Ranch

If you would like to learn more about the ways Chaffee County Early Childhood Council supports local early childhood professionals visit [www.ccecc.org](http://www.ccecc.org)