



St. Thomas Early Learning Centre
**ANNUAL COMMUNITY
REPORT 2023**



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Who We Are

Mission Statement



The Early Learning Centre is committed to providing quality care to families in Elgin and the surrounding areas. This care is delivered alongside learning experiences for all children, and is provided in a safe, warm, and nurturing environment. Diverse and plentiful play experiences are encouraged and facilitated by trained and experienced staff. We provide opportunities for optimal growth in all areas of development for every child.

Our commitment to quality care embodies respect and support for the families and staff utilizing our services. This is achieved through the collaborative efforts of parents, staff, board members, and community partners.

Vision Statement



The Early Learning Centre will continue to build positive and responsive relationships with and between staff, children, families, and the community. This interconnectedness supports a holistic focus on children's social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive development, while supporting families and relationships within the community.

Values



Quality

In conjunction with feedback from surveys, ELC will ensure we are providing quality environments and experiences for children to explore ideas, investigate their outcomes, and interact with others in play.

Relationships

Maintaining collaborative, respectful, and open relationships with individuals, families, and community partners to ensure the effective development and delivery of quality programs and services.

Acceptance and Respect

Families should feel that they belong, are valuable contributors to their children's learning, and deserve to be engaged in a meaningful way. Every educator should feel that he/she belongs, is a valuable contributor, and deserves the opportunity to engage in meaningful work.

Collaboration

Connecting with people who have a variety of perspectives, moving towards common goals and interests for the purpose of sharing resources, strategies, innovation, and support. We will continue to work towards a connected and collaborative community in our field.

Professionalism

Providing ongoing opportunities for educators to engage in critical reflection and discussion with others about pedagogy and practice to support continuous professional learning and growth.

Integrity

Guided by the code of ethics, we reflect the profession's core set of beliefs and values of care, respect, trust, and honesty.

Our Team

Board and Executive Director Welcome Message

It is hard to believe that 2023 has come to a close and I am thrilled that we had yet another incredible year for the organization thanks to all of the hard work and dedication from Michelle, the amazing staff at ELC, and support from our board of directors.

It always amazes me how quickly the year passes, and I think it is important to note how great this year was for ELC staff, parents, and children. Our community has shown incredible support for this organization, and it would not succeed without our dedicated staff. This year the organization continued its focus on staff development by attending workshops to grow their skill sets and I know this initiative will be something that staff continues to look forward to year after year. It is imperative we invest the time and resources into developing our team so they can continue to provide the much-needed support for our children and grow with the organization. I am proud of the team of ECEs, EAs, and all staff who consistently ensure our children are heard, cared for, welcomed, and enriched and we know that the children will continue to thrive as we move through another year.

I would also like to send a huge thank you to our board members and our entire community where the number one focus is always on what is best for our centre, our staff, and our children. We are certainly set up for another successful year and I thank you for the contributions you have provided and will continue to provide as we move forward.

Thank you to Michelle, the board, the staff of ELC, and our wonderful community for all of their contributions over the year. From giving back in times of need, to organizing fundraising, to ensuring that the Centres run top notch – this could not have been done without you all! I look forward to another year of greatness with this organization and could not be prouder to be a small part of the big picture!

Thank you all,

Erin Cochrane, St. Thomas Early Learning Board Chair
on behalf of the Board of Directors

Michelle Good, Executive Director

Staff Members 2023

Early Learning Centre - Head Office

Michelle Good, RECE, Executive Director, 16 yrs

Carleen Pinnell, Human Resources, 9 yrs

Pamela Graham, Finance, 7 months

Home Care

Mandy Nicholson, Director, 32 yrs

Sara Weadick, RECE, Home Visitor, 15 yrs

Dalewood

Laura McEown, RECE, Director, 6 yrs

Chloe Goodhue, RECE, Supervisor, 8 yrs

Sarah Pepper, RECE, Supervisor, 5 yrs

Kerry Jeffery, RECE, Director, 27 yrs (medical leave)

Michelle McCutcheon, RECE, 8 yrs

Pamela Fernandes, RECE, 7 yrs

Trish Howard, CYW, 7 yrs

Danielle Welbourn, RECE, 6 yrs

Jessica Hartford, RECE, 6 yrs

Kristina Haskell, RECE, 6 yrs

Ben Yanch, Cook, 8 yrs

Amanda Robinson, Apprentice, 5 yrs

Alyssa Weaver, RECE, 5 yrs

Julia Lacelle, RECE, 5 yrs

Morgan Spriggs, Assistant, 3 yrs

Sherri Kellestine, RECE, 4 yrs

Cassandra Johnston, RECE, 3 yrs

Chrissy Didone, Assistant, 3 yrs

Nathalie Breed, RECE, 3 yrs

Sandra Domingues, RECE, 3 yrs

Catherine Watson, Assistant, 3 yrs

Amanda Rice, RECE, 3 yrs

Shantell Sundercock, Apprentice, 2 yrs

Riley Bishop, Assistant, 2 yrs

Jennilee Medyln, Apprentice, 1 yr

Brandon Abel, Assistant, < 1 yr

Brayden Vaughan, Assistant, < 1 yr

Scarlett Hao, RECE, < 1 yr

Halley Rowsell, Assistant, < 1 yr

Orchard Park

Lauren Goossens, RECE, Director, 13 yrs

Jacqueline Kalman, RECE, Supervisor, 8 yrs

Tracy Small, RECE, 12 yrs

Natasha Friesen, RECE, 8 yrs

Lindsay Lamb, RECE, 7 yrs

Melissa Hamilton, RECE, 7 yrs

Jaime Rehlinger, RECE, 5 yrs

Jessica Durnin, Assistant, 5 yrs

Andrea Goodhue, RECE 3 yrs

Miranda Campos, Apprentice, 2 yrs

Melissa Tussuzian, Cook, 2 yrs

Hailey Carlson, Assistant, <1 yr

Amber Bury, RECE, < 1 yr

Jami Wokral, RECE, < 1 yr

Aspen

Deanne Albic, RECE, Director, 17 yrs

Rose Molina, Cook, 22 yrs

Lisa Carter, Assistant, 16 yrs

Ouen Sem, Assistant, 9 yrs

Mary-Ellen Hicknell, RECE, 9 yrs

Kristen Vandenbor, RECE, 7 yrs

Taylor Parish, Assistant, 3 yrs

Kirsten Stone, Assistant, 3 yrs

Rebecca Miller, RECE, 2 yrs

Kayla Zegers, RECE, 2 yrs

Ramona Langille, Assistant, 1 yr

Allison Kruppe, RECE, < 1 yr

Aylmer

Candice Ruyter, RECE, Director, 9 yrs (mat. leave)

Tammy Giesbrecht, RECE, Supervisor, 10 yrs

Jordan Triska, RECE, 6 yrs

Rachel Smith, RECE, 3 yrs

Leah Hewit, Cook, 3 yrs

Cara Wilson, RECE, 3 yrs

Trish Oprenochok, RECE, 1 yr

Kassie Knelsen, RECE, < 1 yr

Emily Hill, RECE, <1 yr

Custodial/Maintenance

Kevin Dowell, 17 yrs

Trace Laemers, 9 yrs

Professional Learning

St. Thomas & Elgin educators have been able to attend Professional Learning workshops at no cost. Workshops were provided through STRIVE with support from St. Thomas Children Services.

Early Learning staff had the opportunity to attend the following workshops during 2023.

Extreme Makeover: Educators had the opportunity to learn about the value of caring for the spaces in which they work. Educators were able to tour a local childcare centre and gain inspiration for their programs.

Connections with Clay - Inspiring Educators in the Early Years with Krista Thompson: In this interactive workshop, educators explored clay and sculpture. Through hands-on experiences, individuals were able to examine how the artistic process encourages belonging, expression, engagement, and well-being. There was also a focus on how educators can apply this medium in their early years programming and the importance art plays in child development.

The Power of Courageous Leadership with Rosita Hall: Leaders were walked through the reality of COVID-19 and how it has redefined the term "business as usual" for every organization and requires that leaders develop a newfound energy, focus, agility, adaptability, and resiliency to lead others through strange and uncharted end waters.

Changes, Challenges and Choices – Unleashing the WOW Factor (You've got the Power) with Rosita Hall: Educators recognized how as early years professionals they have always risen to the occasion in the face of changes, challenges, and unpredictability – however, the past two and half years delivered a powerful sucker punch that left many of us still wobbling emotionally, physically, and spiritually and anxious about what the future might hold. When we tap into our WOW factors we are able to move forward with confidence, build healthier relationships, communicate better, and create a work environment and culture that prioritizes belonging, connection, and community.

Leading Inspired Podcast: Our very own Lauren Goossens joined Ali from STRIVE to discuss the importance of our connections with children, families, colleagues, and most significantly, ourselves. Lauren shared how a primary care model has facilitated relationship building, the power of vulnerability, and how she supports a culture of listening in her role as a leader.

Focus on the 90% with Darci Lang: Darci spoke to educators about focusing on the 90%. By holding a magnifying glass out in front of us, we can choose to do one of two things with the magnifying glass: focusing on the positive 90% in our lives that work, or focus on the negative 10% that don't work.

London Children's Museum for Inspired Creativity: Ways to Ignite Curiosity and Spark Interest: During this session educators were reminded to put play back into art by taking simple ideas and going beyond paper and pen. Educators explored the benefits of Process vs Product as well as how documentation of this work can be just as special and impactful as a take home craft.

Winter Rethink 2023: This year educators revisited the foundation of belonging as a lens through which we understand our pedagogy, ourselves, and the children and families we care for. Natalie Royer from the Saroy Group guided us in leading with Love and Compassion: Self-reflection and Understanding Our Biases. This day was also incorporated with inspiring stories from educators within our community.

Organizational Leadership Program

Three members of the Leadership team had the opportunity to complete a training program that was designed by Early childhood Professionals combining their many years of experience in Childcare Management. They were given the opportunity to Learn how to enhance and refine their organizational leadership skills while gaining knowledge from educators working in the field.



Programs and Services

Program Statement

To ensure that we provide high quality experience for families and children, our programming and pedagogy is guided by the *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (2014) document.

Every child has a sense of ***belonging*** when they are connected to others and contribute to their world.

Every child is developing a sense of self, health and ***well-being***.

Every child is an active and ***engaged*** learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.

Every child is a capable communicator who ***expresses*** themselves in many ways.

Within a warm, nurturing environment, children actively participate in positive, interactive experiences that are based on their current interests and real-life experiences. Our programs are flexible and creative and provide children opportunities for decision-making and growth towards independence and responsibility.

We view children as resourceful and competent, capable of complex thinking, and rich in potential. By observing the children's interactions and language, we learn about their interests, experiences, and needs. By recognizing and acting upon teachable moments, the program staff engage children in planning activities that are meaningful and relevant to their world. With the guidance of the educators/Home Care Providers, projects are chosen that generate enough interest and curiosity to provoke children's creative thinking and problem-solving and are open to different avenues of exploration.

We value positive and responsive relationships with families. By engaging families in a meaningful way, this partnership ensures that we can focus on their child's social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive development in a holistic way.

Programs and Services

Service Statistics

During 2023 **five hundred and eighty (580) families** within St. Thomas and surrounding areas had access to high quality, accessible, and affordable early learning programs.

There were **seven hundred (700) children** enrolled in St. Thomas Early Learning childcare and home childcare programs in 2023. These children were supported in growing and developing to their full potential through having opportunities for playful learning and rich experiences.

In 2023 **thirty-one (31) licensed home-based childcare programs** were in diverse areas of St. Thomas and Elgin County.

St. Thomas Early Learning offers **four (4) licensed childcare programs**. These programs offer families affordable care options, variable hours, high quality programming, engaged an experienced staff, and nutritious menu options. Inclusive programs are offered where children and family are welcomed, and culture is embraced. Nutrition and the well-being of children are always considered.

Our Team continued to work hard throughout 2023 as we were coming out of the pandemic and returning to our new normal to ensure the following board priorities were addressed within all St. Thomas Early Learning Programs.

- A variety of resources were made available to support children's strengths and needs.
- All programs ensured safe and enriching indoor and outdoor activities presented diverse experiences for children.
- Opportunities for children to have individualized and group play experiences were planned.
- Rich experiences were facilitated to support children's curiosity and well-being.
- Staff were supported in developing skills and strategies to respond to children's individual needs while building on their strengths.
- The Team ensured that spaces were always physically accessible and available for children with various challenges and needs both physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

Supporting Our Community

Early Learning Centre - Aylmer

344 Talbot Street East, Aylmer

Aylmer Early Learning Centre services families with children ages 0-6 years of age and is located within a local community church. The Centre offers care for infants, toddlers, and preschool children with a staff complement of 9 with support from the Administrative Team. A unique aspect of Aylmer is its proximity to the local library, Aylmer Fairgrounds, and parks which all are within walking distance, providing the children with the opportunity to explore their community.



Early Learning Centre - Aspen

1 Aspen Ave, St. Thomas

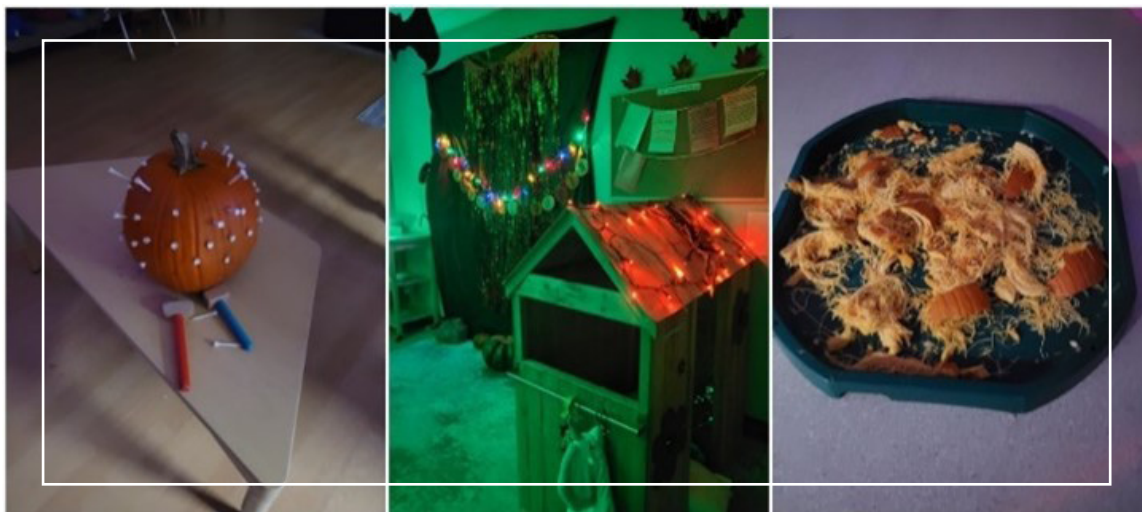
Aspen is a welcoming, house setting Centre located at 1 Aspen Ave. We care for children ages 0-6 with an alternate capacity to serve children 6-12. This program includes 4 classrooms: Infants, Toddlers, and two Preschool rooms. In the yards, you will find sandboxes, bikes, outdoor kitchens, and many more seasonal activities. There is a staff complement of 11 along with support from the Administrative Team. The staff continue to look for opportunities to support rich learning experiences within the unique, home-like setting.



Early Learning Centre - Dalewood

575 Burwell Rd, St. Thomas

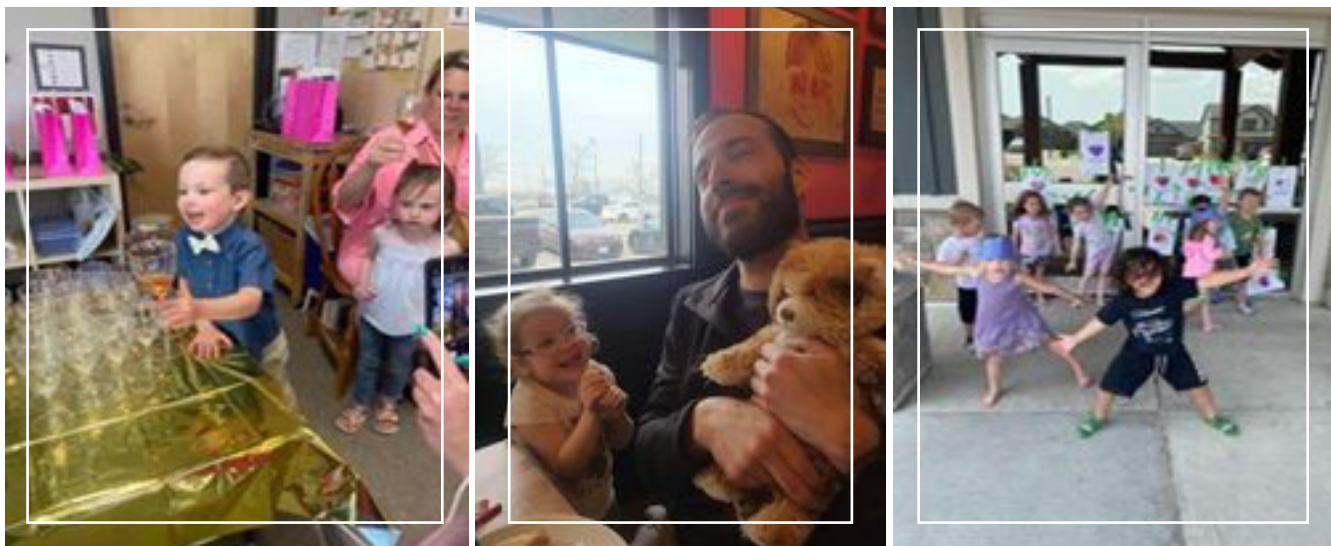
Dalewood is located on the outskirts of St. Thomas, providing services to children 0-6 with a total of eight enriched programs offered to the community with a staff complement of 21 to provide a warm and inviting environment, along with the administrative team which consist of the Executive Director, Finance Manager, and Human Resource Administrator.



Early Learning Centre - Orchard Park

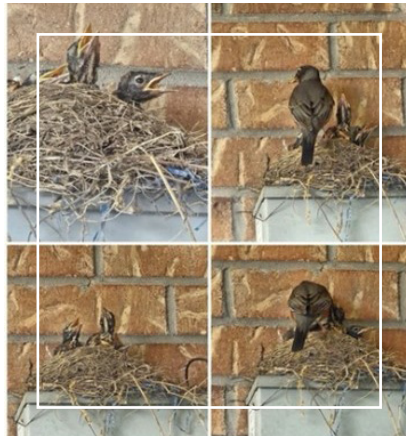
200 Peach Tree, St. Thomas

Orchard Park is in one of St. Thomas' busiest and growing neighborhoods. The Centre serves families with children 0-6 years of age and prides itself on their warm and welcoming environment. Orchard Park offers an Infant, Toddler, and two Preschool programs with a staff complement of 11 along with support from the administrative team. Orchard Park staff continue to ensure they are building strong relationships with their families.



Elgin Home Child Care Services

Each home childcare program is unique for their environments in that they provide a home-like feel for parents looking for a different option. Throughout the past year, we have seen providers taking part in various projects, exploring the environment around them, and encouraging parents to take an active part in their children’s development. The programs also include rich learning experiences and materials like our centre-based programs. Many of our programs offer special outings and learning opportunities right within our community, as well as cultural experiences from around the globe. Most of our home care providers are very active in our local community utilizing EarlyON programs, visiting local parks and libraries, and taking part in other events. Home childcare providers are supported on a regular basis through our Team of Home Visitors who are Registered Early Childhood Educators. The team visits the programs regularly to loan materials, equipment, and resources suitable for multi-age children and to offer professional learning opportunities. The team works alongside the providers to empower them to take the lead and create thought-provoking experiences for the children in their care.



Nutrition and Menu Planning at the ELC

At St. Thomas Early Learning Centre, nutrition and menu planning play an important role in fostering the overall well-being and development of young children. Thoughtful consideration is given to providing a balanced and diverse menu that meets the nutritional needs of growing bodies and supports cognitive development. The menu is carefully crafted to include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, while limiting added sugars and processed foods. Special attention is given to accommodating any dietary restrictions or allergies that children may have. Mealtime is viewed not only as an opportunity to nourish the body, but also as a chance to instill healthy eating habits. Educators often use this time to engage children in discussions about the importance of different food groups, fostering a positive relationship with nutritious choices.



Community Visitors



Blue Boxes Books

Blue boxes for books feature recycling boxes filled with children’s and youth’s books placed in strategic locations throughout the St. Thomas and Elgin area.

Children are encouraged to choose a new or gently used book from the box. They can read it while waiting, take the book home to bring on their next visit, or keep it! The goal is to get children and youth reading! ELC has been taking part in this program since Fall of 2023.



Mud Day: A Fun and Messy Adventure for Children

One of our favorite days of the year is Mud Day. It's a day filled with laughter, creativity, and a whole lot of mess!

Mud Day is all about letting children be children — getting outside, playing in the dirt, and enjoying the simple pleasures of nature. It's a fantastic way for children to explore, learn, and have fun in a way that's completely different from their usual routines.

Mud play supports important aspects of child development. It helps improve sensory skills as kids feel the different textures of mud, squish it in their hands, and even stomp around in it. It encourages creativity as they make mud pies, build little mud houses, or simply enjoy the squishy, slippery feeling between their toes. And of course, all the running, jumping, and digging helps build physical strength and coordination.

On Mud Day, we plan a variety of activities that are designed to be messy, fun, and educational:

- 1. Mud Pies and Sculptures:** We set up a mud kitchen where kids can pretend to be chefs, making mud pies and mud cakes. Some children also love creating sculptures — whether it's a tiny mud castle or a mud creature, the possibilities are endless!
- 2. Mud Painting:** This is a favourite for many kids. We give them big brushes, or even just their hands, and let them paint on large sheets of paper — or on themselves! Mud painting is a fantastic way for kids to express themselves artistically while enjoying the cool, squishy sensation of mud.
- 3. Mud Obstacle Course:** For those who like a bit of adventure, we create a simple obstacle course with plenty of mud. Kids can crawl, jump, and slide their way through, all while getting gloriously muddy.
- 4. Mud Puddle Stomping:** Sometimes, the simplest activities are the most fun. We make sure there are plenty of mud puddles around for the children to jump in and splash around. There's nothing quite like the sound of a big splash and the laughter that follows!
- 5. Mud Faces:** We let the kids use mud as face paint, decorating their faces with swirls, dots, or anything they can imagine. It's all washable, of course, and the kids love transforming into muddy superheroes or animals.



Mud Day: A Fun and Messy Adventure for Children continued

Beyond the fun, Mud Day offers several benefits for children:

- **Sensory Development:** Playing in mud engages all the senses, from the feel of the mud to the sound of squishing, and the sight of their creative efforts.
- **Social Skills:** Mud Day is a great opportunity for kids to play together, share ideas, and work on projects as a team. It fosters cooperation and communication in a relaxed, playful setting.
- **Connection with Nature:** Many children don't get enough time outdoors. Mud Day encourages them to connect with the natural world, fostering a love for the environment and an understanding of the importance of taking care of it.
- **Confidence Building:** There's something empowering about getting messy and exploring new textures. Mud Day helps children build confidence as they try new things and embrace the freedom of unstructured play.



Testimonials from Families and Community Partners

Michelle, thank you for encouraging your staff to participate in our attachment study. They are both so forward thinking, knowledgeable, passionate, and innovative! I SO appreciate hearing and capturing the voices of our St. Thomas R.ECEs and supervisors as I think they have so much to offer to the sector as a whole. It was lovely also to see how they talked with such admiration about YOU. They are so progressive largely to your leadership.

Thanks again. Take care, Tina

Hey Dee,

Lisa and Kayla have made this past month a million times easier for Ensley and myself. Lisa's welcoming face every morning makes drop off a lot easier for Ensley and myself. I love her sense of humour and how in tune she is with all of the little ones in Ensley's room. She has a real gift for what she does!

Kayla is so sweet. She is calm and kind and Ensley adores her! She is always smiling and always on the floor and playing with the little ones.

Ensley is blessed to have two amazing women who love on her all day! They are warm, and loving.. and they have treated Ensley and myself incredibly well.

Ensley also has a huge love for Mona!! We appreciate all of the extra support and encouragement Mona has given to Ensley.

These women are seriously the best!

Elizabeth David

Happy ECE day to all of your wonderful educators! We are so so so thankful for all that you have done and continue to do. Through every milestone and transition, every sickness and rash you all have treated him as your own. We love our Aspen family. You have made being working parents so much easier and we are comforted to know he is in the best hands. From starting as a baby in the infant room to a big boy in the preschool room, he truly has grown up and learned so much and it is because of all of YOU!!! Thank YOU!

Kaitlyn , Dustin & Rhett

We appreciate every single person at Aspen who has had any interaction with our son over the last two years. Every day he comes home we are amazed about something new he has learned! Our family is so blessed and lucky to have the opportunity for our son to attend such a wonderful, safe and caring daycare. Thank you for everything you do!

Rebecca Thibeault

Testimonials from Families and Community Partners continued

Hello,

Colton loves his new preschool teachers. He talks about all of the fun crafts and activities his teachers do with him. I especially hear all about Faith and how much he loves her and misses her when she is away. Colton's parents are so happy he has such loving, fun and caring teachers who look after him and love him like one of their own. ELC Aspen is the best!! We also love Dee.

Heather James

I would like to kindly say that if a parent is looking for a daycare that is like a second home for your child, please consider the Early Learning Centre on Peachtree Blvd. Both of my children have received so much love, care, nurturing and learning from the most amazing people I have ever been blessed to meet. They not only support and nurture your children, they also become an important part of your lives and community as well. I'm honoured that I was able to have such exceptional people care for my children. I'm so grateful for all they do and for how they have helped shape my boys into happy, caring and conscientious beings. Daycares are an essential part of our communities and the caregivers are so important to our lives and our children's lives as well.

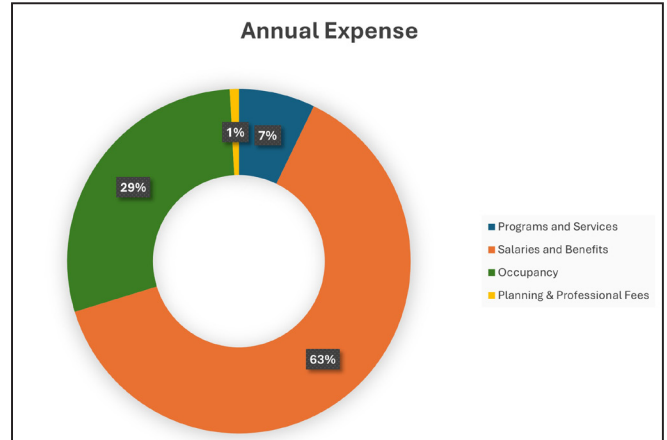
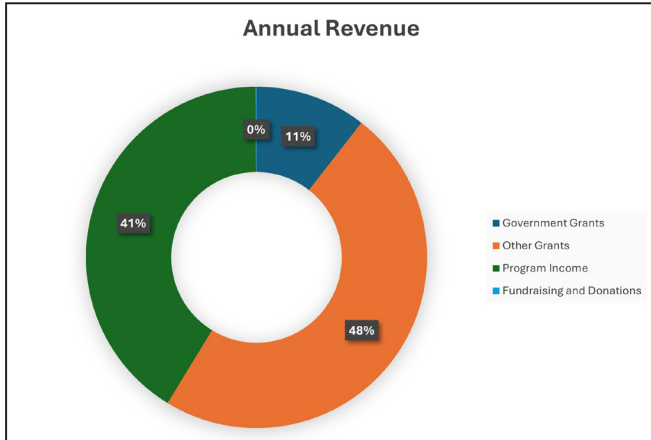
Orchard Park has been a tremendous help to me and mine. I couldn't have asked for a better daycare to have love, support, and teach 2/3 of my children, and when I say love I mean love they truly love and would move mountains for the children there. They will definitely always be special to us.

With Thanks to our Funder

We are continuously grateful for the funding received from the City of St. Thomas in 2023 and the dedicated support of the Children's Services Team through a year of changes within the childcare sector.



2023 Financial Report - January - December



Revenues
<p>Government Grants General Operating Grant</p>
<p>Other Grants Merrymount Wage Subsidy CWELCC Wage Enhancement Subsidy City Subsidy - Fees</p>
<p>Program Income Fees: Infant/Toddlers/Preschool/School Age Home Care Parent Portion Registration Fee and Other Childcare Fees</p>
<p>Fundraising and Donations All Fundraisers Completed in 2023</p>

Expenses
<p>Programs and Services Staff Development • Housekeeping/Hygiene (all cleaning, PPE supplies) • License Fees • Program Supplies • Food/Kitchen Supplies</p>
<p>Salaries & Benefits All Salaries, Wages, and Benefits for all Staff</p>
<p>Occupancy Homecare Provider Fees • Mortgage/Interest Payments • Bank Fees • Rent • Taxes • Hydro/Water/Gas • Telephone & Internet • Building Upgrades & Maintenance • Computer Maintenance • Office Equipment • Equipment • Health & Safety Expenses • Playground costs</p>
<p>Planning & Professional Fees Bad Debts • Payroll Processing Change • Mileage • Computer Software • Depreciation & Amortization • Office Supplies • Insurance • Accounting/Auditing • Advertising • Board/Staff Expense • Credit Card Merchant Fees • Bank Charges • Computer Equipment</p>

