

# Connections For Children

Annual Report 2016





## LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

# Focusing on Children and Community

### DEAR FRIENDS,

Connections For Children was founded more than 40 years ago to ensure that West Side and South Bay families of Los Angeles County have access to high quality, affordable early care and education that supports their children's growth and development. Since the beginning, our mission and services have centered on nurturing young children's language and early literacy development. We also help hundreds of early childhood educators to improve and sustain their programs in order to best support children's wellbeing, health and early learning. Over the years CFC has grown and flourished. Today we're proud to assist more than 3,500 families each year with resources, information, financial aid and referrals to early childhood programs.

From its inception in the 1980's with our first *Toy Loan* van, CFC took its programs to the community by sharing books and stories with children at child care homes. A few years later, CFC's *Preschool in the Park* created playgroups at a number of local parks, giving children and their parents a chance to spend time together reading and telling stories. These activities, begun so many years ago, are still at the heart of our



**Patti Oblath**

Eager to do well, I wrote many proposals — some funded, most not. Then in 2001, CFC became one of the first grantees of First 5 LA when we were awarded a contract to launch the Child Care Literacy Project. Over the program's three years, we worked with nearly 125 family child care providers, helping them to encourage children's early literacy through special activities and daily routines at their sites.

Throughout the years since, we have continued to focus on developing early literacy skills that prepare children for success in school and throughout life. Today, through several generous donors — such as the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, Rotary Club of Santa Monica and the Santa Monica Lions Club — we're able to give all children who visit our office a new book each

current programs.

When I joined the team at CFC as a grant writer nearly 18 years ago, one of my first tasks was to find funding for a new early literacy initiative the board wished to develop.

time they walk through our doors. We continue to train and coach early childhood educators about the importance of early literacy and how to foster children's language development. And, yes, we still offer playgroups in the park!

I'm very pleased that our newest early literacy initiative, *Where The Story Begins*, has taken hold so strongly in its first years of implementation. As you will see in the following pages, we've been able to test the program in different settings and try a variety of activities. *Where The Story Begins* builds on the strengths of children and families in our neighborhoods by providing books and tools to promote reading every day and make learning fun.

We can't do this work without you. We're grateful for your generous support in helping us to grow and thrive over the years as we build our community and nurture our children. Looking to the future, we thank you for your continued belief and confidence in CFC's mission.

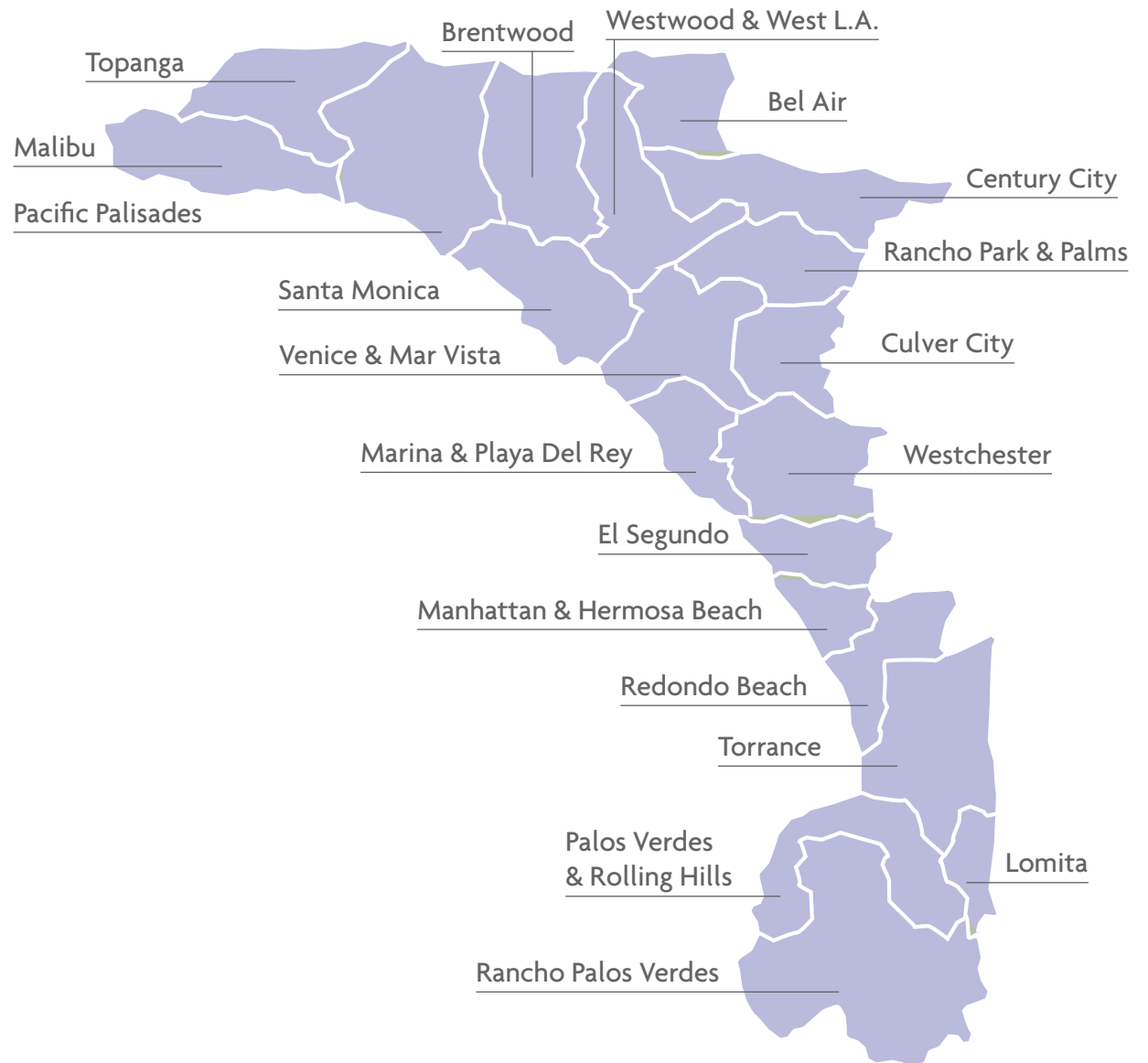
Patti Oblath  
Executive Director

# Our Service Area

We embrace 12% of Los Angeles' population

## Our Mission:

To build a stronger future for children, families and communities through high-quality child care resources, guidance and education.



# At Our Core: Four Key Services

**CONNECTIONS FOR CHILDREN** (CFC) is the go-to expert for early education and child care throughout the Westside and South Bay areas of Los Angeles County. Since our inception, we've grown from a child care referral agency to an organization that provides a wide range of solutions and educational programs for all our stakeholders – children, parents, caregivers and educators. With more than four decades of experience, we are the first step in helping thousands of parents each year to find the quality child care solutions that best meet their families' needs. We offer them guidance in securing financial assistance. We also team up with early childhood educators to improve the quality of care available to our community's children.

## Child Care Referrals

All parents in our service area – no matter their income level – are welcome at CFC, where they will be guided towards safe, experienced and quality licensed day care that meets their families' individual needs and values.

## Financial Assistance

We help eligible low-income parents to obtain affordable quality child care for infants and toddlers as well as preschool and school-age children up to 12 years old. This frees parents to stay in the work force and seek better earning opportunities through continued education.

## Professional Development

Child care providers of all experience levels are invited to take advantage of our educational training, resources and expertise. We help them to learn the latest child care methods in order to provide the best care possible. We also coach them in how to build on their professional successes by improving their businesses.

## Enrichment Programming

Play groups, early literacy, healthy nutrition, physical activity and social and emotional wellbeing – all are addressed within innovative programs that CFC continually updates and creates. These are based on a wealth of cognitive and developmental research showing that outcomes are best for each family when children, parents and educators work together.





# 2016: Big Numbers. Big Impact



**BY EVERY MEASURE**, year after year, CFC successfully fulfills the needs of its stakeholders. CFC has helped thousands of children and families with child care, trained thousands of child care providers and pumped multi-millions of dollars back into the local economy.

## Helping Families

- Requests for child care info, referrals, resources

Fiscal 2016

**3,689**

Cumulative since 1976

**170,000**

- 
- Families securing financial assistance

Fiscal 2016

**957**

Cumulative since 1976

**25,000**

## Early Education

- Children benefiting from financial aid

Fiscal 2016

**1,413**

Cumulative since 1976

**36,500**

- 
- Children and parents benefiting from Family Time

Fiscal 2016

**672**

Cumulative since 1976

**7,000**

## Caregiver Development

- Hours of training, coaching provided by CFC to caregivers

Fiscal 2016

**1,439**

Cumulative since 1976

**39,000**

- 
- Training sessions offered

Fiscal 2016

**95**

Cumulative since 1976

**2,900**

## Pumping up the local economy

- Dollars contributed back through payments for child care

Fiscal 2016

**\$5,930,789**

Cumulative since 1976

**\$191,000,000**

All numbers rounded

**92% of every dollar is used to provide direct services.**

# Enrichment Programs

**A HALLMARK** of quality early care and education is that it encompasses the whole child by emphasizing four key domains of growth that interweave from birth: social and emotional development; physical skills; language learning, and early literacy. With this in mind, and with its creative and wide-ranging programs, Connections For Children is uniquely able to address not only these individual needs of children but those of their families as well as early educators in our community.

## Where The Story Begins

Early literacy skills, which lead to learning to read and write, unlock the key to future learning. Children who are read to daily are more likely to become successful readers. *Where the Story Begins*, CFC's innovative reading readiness initiative, targets the most vulnerable children in our community. Parents and caregivers, guided by CFC's early childhood specialists, explore the beginnings of literacy – talking, reading and singing — in order to nurture language and vocabulary development. Currently offered in Santa Monica parks and Community Corps housing facilities, *Where the Story Begins* is preparing to expand during the next two years to the Culver City, Torrance and Lomita communities.

## Building Blocks For Kindergarten

Children's preparation for kindergarten begins at birth. *Building Blocks for Kindergarten* helps ensure that parents have the tips and tools — in print, online and through the use of apps — to best support their children as they get ready. This community-wide initiative, which was launched in Santa Monica three years ago and is led by CFC, makes early learning a key priority. This year, we'll focus on supporting infants and toddlers to grow and thrive by nurturing their natural eagerness to learn through everything they do each day.

## Nutrition And Activity

Because children's physical well-being is a vital element of healthy development, about one-third of CFC's trainings for early childhood educators focus on nutrition, health and children's physical development. The *Nutrition and Activity* program helps to ensure that child care providers know about wholesome food choices, portion sizes and active movement indoors and outside. Looking ahead, this program will be doing additional education of — and outreach to — child care practitioners and parents, continuing an important emphasis of CFC's work. The goal is to check the epidemic of early childhood obesity and to nurture young bodies and promote essential motor skills.

## Family Time

For some families, a playgroup in the park with parents, caregivers and children is the best way to learn new things. The weekly *Family Time* gives everyone the opportunity to experience age-appropriate learning activities alongside peers. One of CFC's longest running programs, *Family Time* dates from one of CFC's earliest activities, *Preschool in the Park*, begun in the 1980s. For children, it's often the first taste of preschool. For parents, it's an easy way to ask for resources and tips. The next step for *Family Time* is to expand the fun by creating new playgroups in a South Bay park.

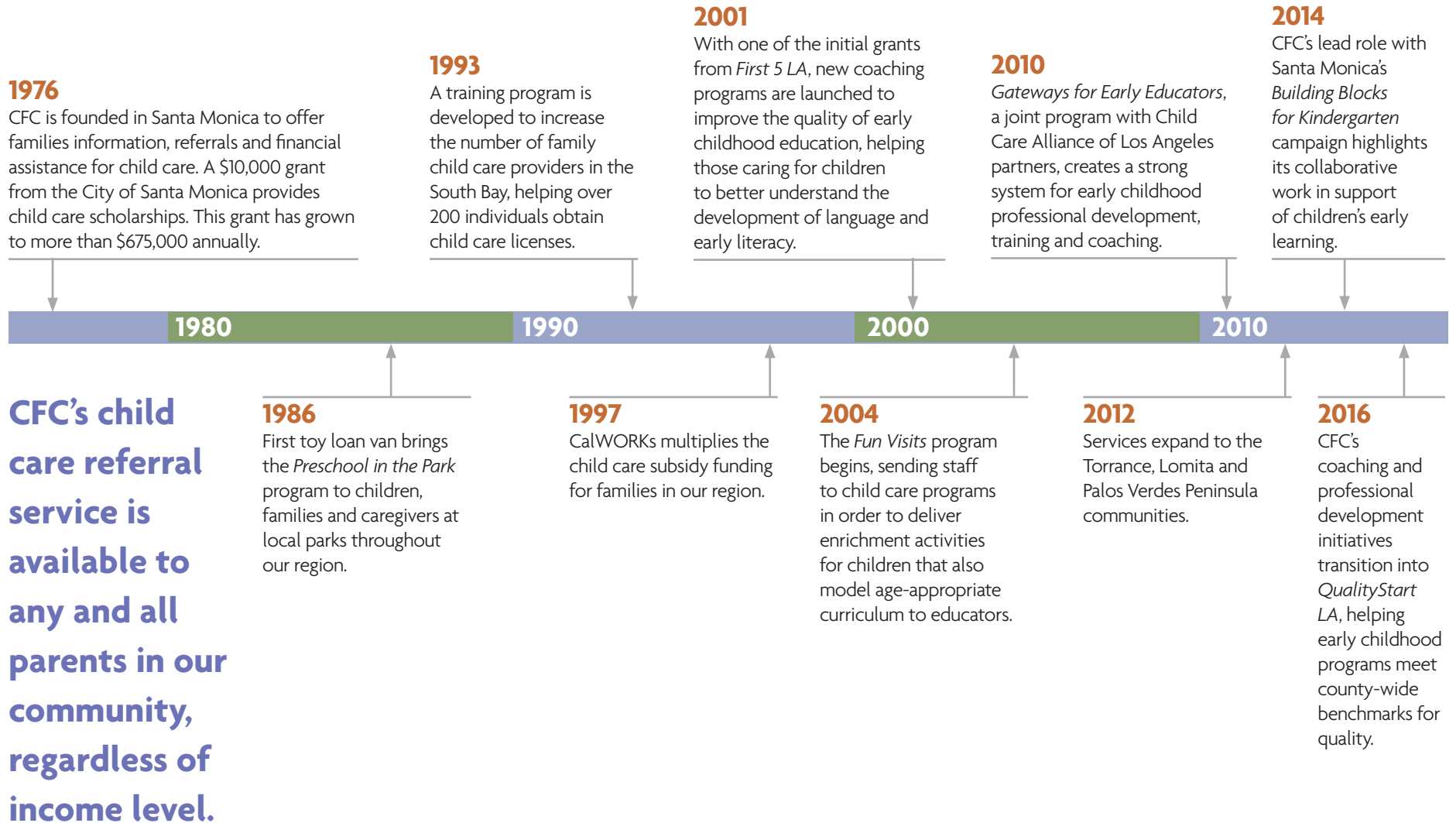
## Coaching Educators

CFC's longtime commitment to coaching as a key tool for improving the quality of care has evolved as Los Angeles County's QualityStart rating system rolls out. Building on five years of outstanding results shown by the CFC's *Gateways for Early Educators* program, early childhood educators have the opportunity to earn a quality rating from the county. CFC's child development coaches will continue to provide a high level of personal attention to training and intensive coaching that prepares participants to better engage children in play and activity that builds communication skills and general knowledge.



# Connections Over Time

**MORE THAN** 40 years have passed since CFC began helping families from a tiny backroom office. Today, over three dozen employees serve 3,000 children each year. Here are some of CFC's key moments:



# Where the Story Begins

**TO SOME PEOPLE** it might seem that reading stories to children is simply a nice thing to do – a way for children and their parents or caregivers to spend a little quiet time together. But as Connections For Children has long recognized, story-telling is also a first important step to learning to read – a road that we now know leads to better success in school, work and life.

A recent study published in the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics presented hard evidence – observed during MRI scans – that reading aloud to children activates the parts of pre-schoolers’ brains that help with mental imagery and understanding narrative.<sup>1</sup>

“Both are key for the development of language and literacy,” said Patti Oblath, executive director of Connections For Children. “There’s no question that reading to children throughout infancy and early childhood improves literacy skills and helps foster literacy development.”

But not all parents or caregivers have the tools at hand – including access to books, or even their own literacy skills – to do this with confidence. Connections For Children many years ago made it a priority to bridge this gap. Over its more

than four-decade history, it developed numerous programs to help parents and caregivers to foster the language development of the children in their lives.

In recent years, while continuing to help parents at all income levels find quality child care for their children, CFC has expanded its literacy programs to help level the playing field for all children. Today, its well-regarded *Where the Story Begins* reading readiness program, which was launched at Santa Monica’s Virginia Avenue Park in 2014, is set to expand to Lomita, Torrance, Culver City and other communities where there is a need.

At these WTSB gatherings, parents and caregivers overseeing toddlers and young children

**“Communication skills and future academic success are significantly improved by our early literacy program.” —Patti Oblath**

– primarily children who are not currently in a preschool setting — come to learn concrete activities to foster early learning and reading readiness skills.

“We gear the books to the age group of the children who participate,” said Monica Delia, WTSB’s program coordinator. “Right now we have a lot of infants and toddlers attending so we have books appropriate for their ages.” Books often are also keyed to Spanish or other languages spoken at home. As an added bonus, after the session, the children can take a copy of the book home with them.

Often at *Where the Story Begins* gatherings, arts & crafts or sensory experiences are employed that relate to the book being read that day. At one recent session, after reading together “It Looked Like Spilt Milk” by Charles G. Shaw, the children made their own soft ice cream by mixing milk, vanilla and sugar in small plastic bags and then stirring in ice water. “The children were so excited,” Delia said. “And this is something parents can do again at home.”

Also shared are ideas for how parents and caregivers can keep a conversation going with children during such simple, everyday activities such as grocery shopping, taking a walk or riding the bus.

One grateful parent who brought her

.....  
1. “Home Reading Environment and Brain Activation in Preschool Children Listening to Stories”; *Pediatrics*, the official journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, September, 2015.





daughter to *Where the Story Begins* said that it and other Connections For Children programs have “translated into my daughter’s increased engagement and independence at home.” She added that the books that were distributed there, plus the catchy songs that were sung and other fun activities, “had us both hooked” but that it was the caring staff member “that made us stay.”

“As a parent it was so nice to know that I had the social support system to help my child, as

well as myself,” she said.

Among side benefits of *Where the Story Begins* is that it provides satisfying volunteer opportunities for CFC supporters. “Anyone who can read, sing or talk can join in to support children’s pre-literacy skills,” Oblath said. “Everyone enjoys these fun activities, which focus on nurturing young children’s language and early development.”

Becoming literate is a long, gradual experience

that begins with an infant’s first experiences with soft-cloth or chubby-board books and continues with picture and story books. Connections For Children’s *Where the Story Begins* is committed to helping put children firmly on that path.

“That’s our goal,” Oblath said. “We take great pride in the work we do with our parents and caregivers to help shape a better future for our children.”

# Measuring Success

**OVER THE PAST** 30 years, studies of the science of early childhood have provided tangible evidence that high quality programs addressing children’s needs have substantial and enduring payoffs. Study after study shows the impacts are greatest for children who are the most at-risk or economically disadvantaged. But the benefits of high-quality early education are clear for children from all socio-economic backgrounds – whether from poor, middle-income or upper-income families.

Scientists in a variety of fields, including medicine, neurobiology, economics, and developmental psychology, have joined with education experts in studying early childhood education.

Among recent findings:

- A Washington Center for Equitable Growth study indicated that investments in the early education of future workers can improve their educational achievement and narrow socioeconomic-based achievement gaps. The study indicated that effective early childhood education creates a range of external benefits to society as a whole, accelerating our country’s economic growth and promoting equal opportunity over time.<sup>1</sup>
- A study of Head Start programs in Tulsa, Okla., found that deeper parental involvement has a positive effect on outcomes for children and adults alike and that, in order to help kids, it

is often advantageous to help their parents as well. This approach to Head Start is potentially game-changing, linking Head Start services for kids with intensive parental support, including education and training to help parents build careers in health care fields.<sup>2</sup>

- Although some critics cite studies that indicate that the benefits of early childhood programs fade out, American economist and Nobel laureate James J. Heckman, who has studied these issues, found otherwise when looking at programs in North Carolina. He found that, even if some cognitive skills taper in the short-run, early childhood programs that focus on developing the whole child result in cognitive and socio-emotional skills that persist throughout a child’s life.<sup>3</sup>
- A comprehensive study of 20,000 children, conducted by the University of Missouri College of Education showed that, on average, children who had completed a year of preschool had alphabet recognition skills that were more than 85 percent higher than those who had not. Alphabet recognition is an important ingredient in developing reading skills, in turn a key predictor of children’s academic success.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the list of proven long-term benefits from early childhood education is long:

- Higher levels of verbal, mathematical and general intellectual achievement.
- Greater success at school, including fewer children who are held back at a grade level.
- Higher graduation rates.
- Better health outcomes.
- Less likelihood of special education enrollment.
- Less welfare dependency.
- Greater government revenues.
- Lower government expenditures.
- Reduced likelihood of juvenile delinquency or adult incarceration.
- Higher employment and earnings.

As a public policy strategy, supporting and investing in high-quality early childhood education simply makes sense. It is an effective route to accelerating equitable growth. It raises national rankings for students in reading, math and science skills. And it helps keep us competitive with other countries throughout the world.

- .....
1. “The Benefits and Costs of Investing in Early Childhood Education”; Washington Center for Equitable Growth; December, 2015.
  2. “The effects of Tulsa’s CAP Head Start program on middle-school academic outcomes and progress”; Developmental Psychology, August, 2016
  3. “Impact of North Carolina’s Early Childhood Program and Policies on Educational Outcomes in Elementary School”; Child Development, 2016.
  4. “Does attending a state-funded preschool program improve letter name knowledge?”; Early Childhood Research Quarterly; First Quarter, 2017.



# Measuring CFC's Program Outcomes

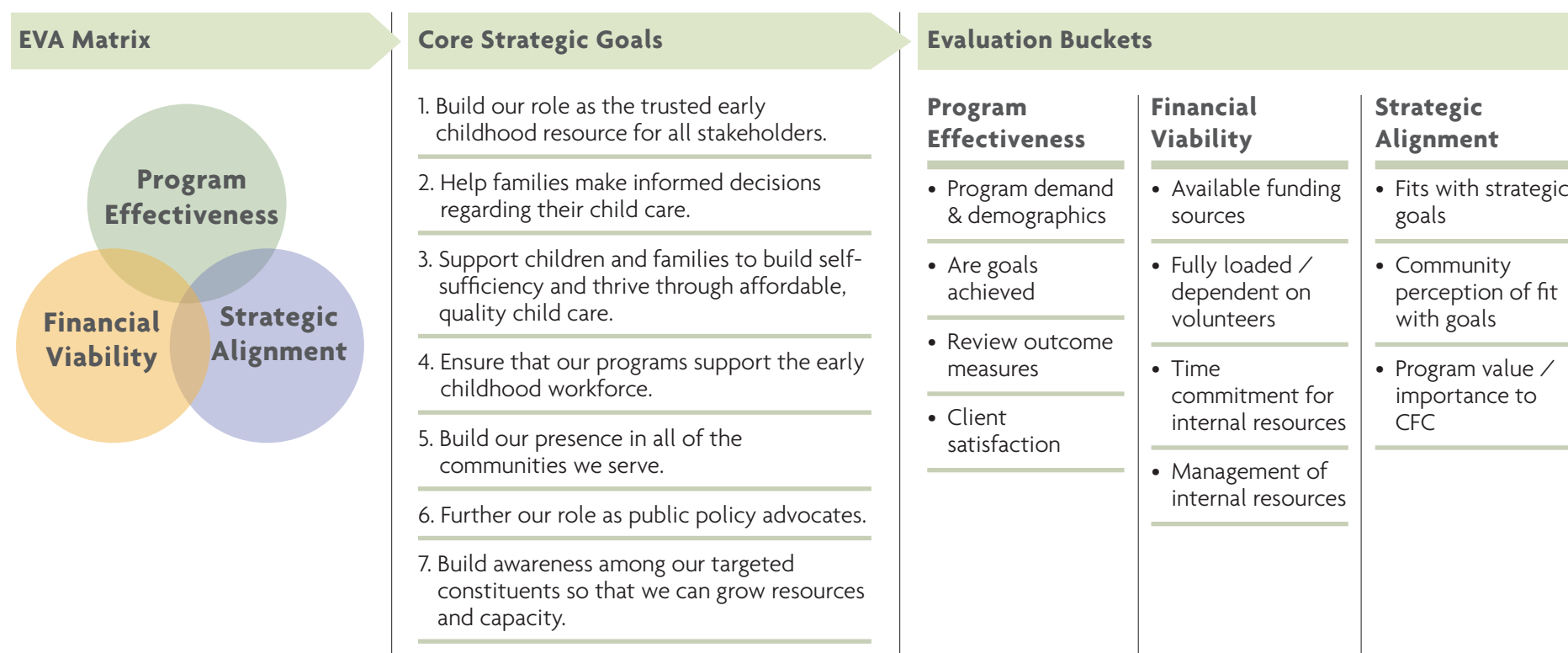
## The EVA Evaluation Matrix

**HOW DOES** an organization as complex as Connections For Children know that its programs are successful? Certainly CFC's quantitative success is reflected in the large number of children and families served. But measuring qualitative and strategic success requires deeper analysis.

To that end, CFC developed the EVA Evaluation

Matrix. EVA stands for program Effectiveness, financial Viability and strategic Alignment. EVA provides insights into how and why programs are working and how improvements can be made. The process also helps CFC innovate new programs and respond to emerging community needs. It's all about intelligent allocation of resources.

The process starts with CFC's seven core strategic goals. All programs must align with at least five. With the goals in mind, staff members review each program using the EVA Matrix and asking the questions that are highlighted under each evaluation bucket.



# 2015 Financial Report

## Statement of Activities

### SOURCES OF REVENUE

<b>Federal Awards</b>	\$3,209,052
<b>State Allocations</b>	3,510,548
<b>Other Grants and Contracts<sup>1</sup></b>	1,586,214
<b>Parent Fees</b>	228,301
<b>Contributions</b>	50,373
<b>Other Revenue</b>	14,522
<b>Investment Income</b>	19,287
<b>Unrealized Loss on Investments</b>	(24,406)
<b>Total</b>	8,593,891

### USES OF REVENUE

<b>Child Care Assistance</b>	7,385,136
<b>Child Care Referral Services</b>	264,992
<b>Other Child Care Services</b>	325,854
<b>General Administrative Costs</b>	575,389
<b>Fundraising Expenses</b>	5,500
<b>Total</b>	8,556,871
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	37,020
<b>Net Assets Beginning of Year</b>	941,093
<b>Net Assets End of Year</b>	\$ 978,113

1. Includes local government and private grants and contracts

## Statement of Financial Position

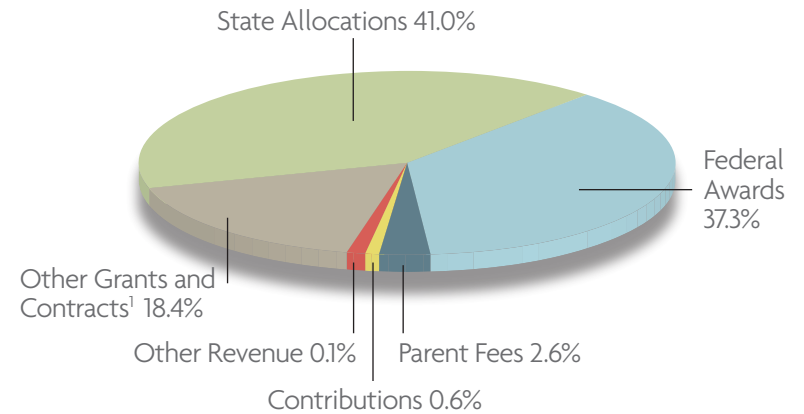
### ASSETS

<b>Cash and Cash Equivalents</b>	\$497,367
<b>Grants Receivable</b>	741,868
<b>Investments</b>	359,328
<b>Other Receivables</b>	18,214
<b>Prepaid Expenses</b>	78,551
<b>Fixed Assets</b>	97,460
<b>Deposits</b>	12,577
<b>Total Assets</b>	1,805,365

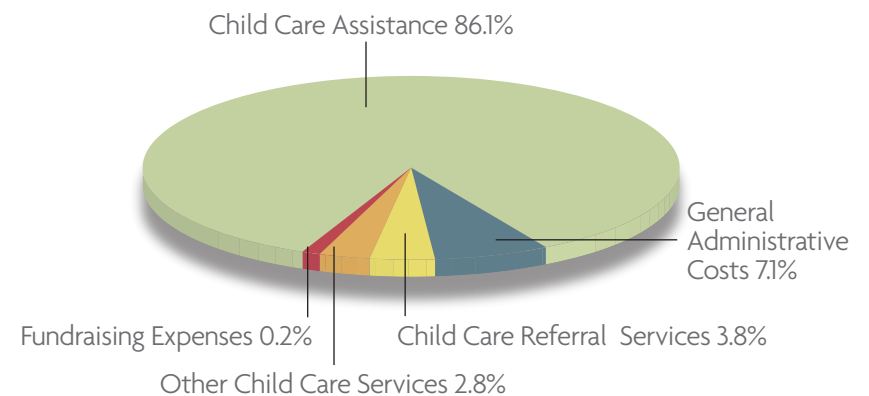
### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

<b>Accounts Payable</b>	709,616
<b>Accrued Expenses</b>	110,167
<b>Grants Payable</b>	7,469
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	827,252
<b>Temporarily Restricted Assets</b>	23,180
<b>Unrestricted Assets</b>	954,933
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	978,113
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	\$1,805,365

## Sources of Revenue Breakdown



## Uses of Revenue Breakdown





# The Connections For Children Team

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& Early Education Task Force

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Keith Wishon



## Our Major Grant and Contract Funders

California Department  
of Education, Child  
Development  
Division

Los Angeles County  
Department of Public  
Social Services (DPSS)

City of Santa Monica

First 5 LA

Los Angeles County  
Office of Education

Child Care Alliance  
of Los Angeles

California Child  
Care Resource and  
Referral Network

Vista Del Mar Child  
and Family Services  
Home-SAFE

Los Angeles County  
Department of  
Public Health (DPH)

## Volunteers

Connections For Children is grateful for the involvement of its many volunteers, including Holiday Angels, Santa Monica middle school students, Where The Story Begins readers, and all the many individuals who helped us throughout the year.

## Credits

With sincere appreciation to the children and families of Family Time for permission to take their photos. Special thanks to Mathieu Young Photography and Margaret Malloy Photography for the wonderful images in this Annual Report; to Tom Trapnell Design and writer Claudia Luther.







# Your Donation Makes a Difference



**Every dollar invested in early childhood comes  
back many times over in lasting economic success,  
better health and greater productivity.**

—Rand Study on Early Childhood Policy in Los Angeles

**IT'S NOW CLEARER** than ever that early childhood programs create dividends not just for our children and their families but for society as well. Research has shown that the benefits far outweigh the costs by decreasing the likelihood of special education enrollment, juvenile delinquency, adult incarceration and welfare participation.

And the benefits don't stop there. Parents who have access to quality child care also are able to upgrade their skills, get better jobs and have their families be self-sufficient. Everyone wins.

Yet despite what we know about the benefits to children and society, social services programs funded by the government have long fallen short.

That's why your financial support is needed. Help us ensure that every child and family has access to programs that help promote the success of our children in school and in life. Contact us today.

## **Connections For Children**

2701 Ocean Park Blvd., Suite 253

Santa Monica, CA 90405

Phone: (310) 452-3325

[www.connectionsforchildren.org](http://www.connectionsforchildren.org)