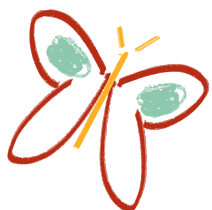


FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF ROUTT COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD COUNCIL

Annual Report
2025




First Impressions
OF ROUTT COUNTY

Dear Friends and Partners,

Each year, I am reminded that our early childhood system is built on something stronger than funding or policy. It is built on people. The parents balancing work and family, the educators who show up every day with care and creativity, and the partners who believe that investing in early childhood is investing in the future of Routt County.

This year brought both remarkable growth and undeniable challenges. Our community felt the strain when local child care capacity shifted, which reminded us how delicate and essential this system truly is. Yet even amid uncertainty, what shined through was resilience. Providers supported one another, partners collaborated in new ways, and local leaders reaffirmed their commitment to early childhood care and education.

At First Impressions, we channeled that energy into progress. Through the Attorney General's Youth Well Being Challenge Grant, we launched Conscious Discipline training and coaching across the county, giving teachers tools to strengthen relationships and support children's emotional well-being. Through the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant, we began building a shared literacy vision by expanding access to high-quality training, early language supports such as LENA Grow, and a countywide literacy plan for children from birth through kindergarten entry.

These efforts reflect what is possible when our community aligns passion with purpose. Together, we are building a stronger foundation for families, educators, and children to thrive.

As we look ahead, I am filled with gratitude for our partners, our providers, and our community's belief that early childhood matters. Thank you for being part of this ongoing work to ensure that Routt County's youngest residents, and those who care for them, continue to grow strong.

With appreciation,

Meg Franges
Executive Director





About First Impressions

Our History

Routt County's Early Childhood Council and the program, First Impressions of Routt County, was formed in March 1997 after extensive community forums and needs assessments.

We engage in a variety of activities to support our mission. From advocating for policies that benefit young children to providing professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, we are committed to creating a nurturing and supportive environment for children to learn, grow, and thrive.

Vision

The First Impressions Council strengthens the community's collaborative web of resources where children, families and educators experience dignity and a sense of belonging.

Mission

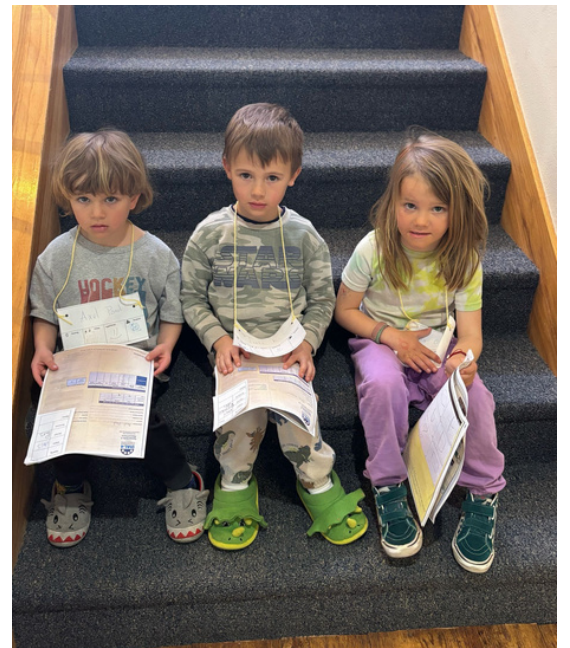
First Impressions of Routt County works to ensure that young children and educators will be provided adequate resources and quality programs to promote healthy development and school readiness.

Our Values

Engage: Actively informing and involving the community, stakeholders, and partners in the mission and initiatives of First Impressions.

Advance: Striving for progress and improvement in the field of early childhood development.

Access: Promoting inclusivity and equitable access to resources and services.



Programs

Universal Preschool (UPK)

We're excited to serve as Routt County's local coordinator for UPK Colorado, providing families with flexible preschool options, whether in community-based centers, schools, or home-based care. Through UPK, families of 4-year-olds (and eligible 3-year-olds) can find the right fit for their child's education.

- **As of December 2025 we have 10 participating UPK providers**
- **154 4 year olds are enrolled with participating providers**
- **Total UPK funding for Routt County is \$1,233,513.57**

Tuition Assistance

Making quality childcare more affordable, our Tuition Assistance Program has helped 26 working families keep childcare costs manageable, supporting them with a total of \$93,759 across nine licensed centers. With First Impressions, families up to 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) pay no more than 14% of their income toward childcare costs.

- **As of December 2025, our tuition assistance programs have supported 26 working families with \$93,759 across nine licensed centers.**

Professional Development

Quality early learning options require a qualified, fairly compensated early childhood workforce. First Impressions works to ensure safe, nurturing, and engaging early learning environments are a choice for all of Routt County's young children. The classes include essential topics such as child nutrition, health, and safety (ECE 2051), child growth and development (ECE 2381), and curriculum methods and techniques (ECE 2621), equipping them with the skills to create safe, nurturing, and engaging learning environments for Routt County's youngest children.

- **During 2025 First Impressions supported 17 early childhood teachers with scholarships totaling \$4,000**

Quality Improvement CSQI

Through the support of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) and generous local donors, child care providers accessed \$26,870 in funding for quality improvement initiatives and coaching. These funds supported critical needs such as classroom materials, staff training, outdoor play equipment, and curriculum enhancements, helping providers deliver high-quality early learning experiences for children in our community.

Community Developmental Screenings

Together with our partners, we conducted developmental screenings for more than 185 children aged 3 to 5. These screenings covered dental, vision and hearing, fine and gross motor skills, language and communication and cognitive development ensuring early support for every child's unique needs. This event was successful due to the support from the Buell Foundation and our community partners like Northwest Colorado Health and Steamboat Springs School District.

Provider & Teacher Appreciation Dinner

Our second annual Provider Appreciation Day was an incredible night of celebration! We hosted 115 educators and childcare providers from across Steamboat Springs, Hayden and South Routt, with dinner, music, awards, and prizes to recognize their dedication. Huge thanks to our sponsors for making it possible and to every provider who shared their passion for early childhood education. Cheers to our amazing award winners, your hard work makes a lasting impact!

Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP)

NPP is a free, evidence-based initiative that helps families strengthen parent-child relationships through positive parenting strategies, improved communication, and emotional development support. This year, 10 families—five English-speaking and five Spanish-speaking—completed the program. The Spanish-speaking cohort represented multiple nationalities, creating meaningful opportunities for connection and shared learning. Parents reported increased confidence, reduced stress, and stronger family bonds. This program was made possible through generous funding from the Buell Foundation.

Conscious Discipline

Colorado Attorney General's Youth Mental Health Challenge Grant

First Impressions of Routt County, alongside community partners, secured a \$528,000 grant from the Colorado Attorney General's Office to launch the largest early childhood professional development effort in our county's history.

This three-year initiative will provide Conscious Discipline training to more than 130 early childhood educators, beginning in October 2025.

Conscious Discipline is a trauma-informed, evidence-based framework that equips educators with strategies to support children's emotional regulation, strengthen relationships, and create safe, connected learning environments. This training not only enhances classroom practices but also prioritizes the well-being of educators—recognizing that when adults feel supported, children thrive.

This investment reflects a powerful message shared by the Attorney General's Office and echoed by our community:

Early childhood matters. Early childhood educators matter.

We are proud to bring this transformative opportunity to Routt County and look forward to the long-term impact it will have on children, families, and educators across our region.



2025 Distinguished Teacher Award

Alice Butler

Lead Preschool Teacher
Discovery Learning Center

Each year, First Impressions presents the Distinguished Teacher Award to an educator who embodies excellence, equity, empathy, and a deep commitment to children and families.

This year, we are proud to recognize Alice Butler, lead preschool teacher at Discovery Learning Center.

For the past six years, Alice has created a nurturing and engaging classroom where young learners feel supported and inspired. Her warmth, creativity, and sense of humor make learning joyful, while her dedication to professional growth and collaboration strengthens her entire school community.

As a parent shares: From the moment my son walks into her classroom, he feels safe, valued, and heard. Alice has a remarkable ability to help young children navigate their emotions by encouraging them to express their feelings openly and without fear. She teaches them that every emotion—whether joy, frustration, or sadness—is valid and worth acknowledging. Rather than dismissing or minimizing their experiences, she empowers them with the language and confidence to understand and articulate their emotions!

A word from Alice:

Forming close relationships and silly inside jokes with my students—as well as venturing out on field trips—are my favorite parts of the job.



We thank Alice for her passion for early learning, her deep care for her students, and her joyful approach to teaching, all of which make her a true reflection of what First Impressions stands for. Her dedication, heart, and excellence in early childhood education inspire us all.

2025 Center Spotlight

Different Structures. Shared Commitment to Quality.

Routt County's early childhood system includes multiple care models that support children, families, and our local workforce. Two examples highlight how structure shapes access and quality.

Employer Based Care

Steamboat Child Care Center operates as an employer supported program, primarily serving Steamboat Ski Resort employees while welcoming community families when space allows. Licensed for year round care for children ages 8 weeks to 7 years, this model strengthens workforce stability by increasing access to child care for working families.

As Director Sarah shares, "At the Steamboat Child Care Center, we believe that high quality early childhood education is built on strong relationships, a deep connection to nature, and a genuine love for our mountain community".

The center offers a nature based preschool and relationship focused infant and toddler care designed to support strong attachments and healthy development.



Family Child Care

Leneh Wingard of Nature and Nurture Family Child Care represents another critical model: licensed home based care. As the only Level 5 rated family child care home in Routt County through Colorado Shines, Nature and Nurture demonstrates that high quality early learning happens in small, relationship driven environments.

Family child care homes expand capacity across neighborhoods, offer smaller group sizes and mixed age learning, and provide flexible options for working families.

A strong early childhood system depends on diverse delivery models. Employer based centers and licensed family child care homes each meet different community needs while sharing a commitment to high quality care for Routt County's youngest learners.



Thank you supporters & partners

Funding Partners

BJT Foundation
Boettcher Foundation
Buell Foundation
Colorado Department of Early Childhood, CDEC
Colorado Department of Education, CDE
Colorado Department of Law
• Office of the Attorney General
Craig-Scheckman Family Foundation, CSFF
Routt County Colorado
Routt County Health and Human Service Coalition, HRC
Yampa Valley Community Foundation, YVCF

Community Partnerships

Ace Hardware	Mountain Valley Bank	Steamboat Floral
Alpine Bank	Mythology	Steamboat Resort
B&K	Old Town Hot Springs	Strings
Christy Sports	Oriely Auto Parts	Talon Grips
City of Steamboat	Sleeping Giant Real Estate	The Group - Carly Kelly
COAEYC	Steamboat Climbing Collective	Town Hall
Cook Chevrolet	Debbie Aragon - State Farm	Wild West Balloon

Executive Committee

Melinda Maas	Erin Ax
Alexis Wolf	Angelica Salinas
Kelly Kissling	

Council Members

Alexis Wolf	Erin Ax	Melinda Maas
Angelica Salinas	Erin Walker	Michelle Hoza
Amy Dickson	Jordan French	Paige Shankerman
Cecilia Morter	Janessa Lomas	Sarah Boerger
Cindy Ashley	Kim Delaney	Torey Wodnik
Colleen Miller	Kelly Kissling	

