

2021 Annual Report





Play is the primary way that children learn to understand and experience the world around them. It is a frame of mind which involves a range of senses - smelling, touching, listening, and being physically active - which connects children to the external world around them and to their inner world of ideas and imagination.

~ Ken Robinson

Rising to the Top



Karen McIlroy,
Chair, Board of Directors

Although 2021 was a year filled with COVID-19 pandemic challenges, RisingOaks Early Learning continued to be a safe and integral part of our community.

Firstly, the organization could not have succeeded in delivering high quality child care without its dedicated team of educators and staff. I'd also like to thank the families who adapted alongside the staff to continually changing policies and practices based on evolving Public Health guidance. The cooperation of everyone involved truly showed how RisingOaks Early Learning values its extended family.

Throughout 2021 the volunteer board of directors met remotely with senior leadership to provide input and guidance, where needed, related to key decisions and pandemic policies.

The board of directors along with the full leadership team, also devoted significant time towards the development of a new strategic plan to be launched in 2022. Thank you to the board for their additional commitment to this process, to the leadership team for sharing their passion and to all

RisingOaks' families and staff who provided input into this new strategic plan. Your participation helped to inform new strategic priorities.

In our first full year as RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario the organization stayed true to its values while delivering world-class child care, despite challenging circumstances. Senior leaders continued their advocacy work with government and child care regulatory bodies, such as the College of Early Childhood Educators, to help improve child care throughout our community and beyond.

With pandemic restrictions slowly lifting in 2022, we look forward to working with all stakeholders on the roll out of our new strategic plan and to seeing all those beautiful smiles when it is safe to do so.

If you are not already, consider becoming a member of RisingOaks Early Learning and please join us at our virtual AGM on April 12, 2022 and to all join us in membership of RisingOaks Early Learning.

Take care and all the best in 2022

Board of Directors

Karen McIlroy | Chair
Amanda Stevens | Vice Chair
Julia Bloom | Treasurer
Alisha Michiels | Secretary
Doug Laginski | Director
Erin Mikha | Director
Jennifer Tieu | Director
Jessica Ronzio | Director
Julia Klann | Director
Tracey Murray | Director
Xenios Ioannou | Director
Lori Prospero | Chief Executive Officer



Play is the highest expression
of human development in
childhood, for it alone is the
free expression of what is in a
child's soul.

~ Friedrich Froebel



Overcoming Obstacles, Thriving Through the Pandemic.



Lori Prospero, CAE
Chief Executive Officer

In 2021, despite the uncertainty of the pandemic, we remained committed to our mission, values and strategic plan. These key elements continued to guide our decisions and advocacy strategies, with health and safety at the forefront of all that we do.

Adjustments were made in day-to-day operations to respond to the changing dynamics of the pandemic. When school-age programs were closed by provincial order for 5 weeks in January and another 11 weeks in the spring, RisingOaks Early Learning provided emergency school-age child care for essential workers, offering 2 locations in January and 4 locations in the spring. Related to the pandemic, advocacy efforts focused on the need for stabilization funding for the sector, prioritization of vaccinations for ECEs, and on adjustments to masking and/or eye protection guidance for ECEs working outdoors in the summer heat.

By May 2021, new funding supports were made available provincially and emergency wage subsidies from the federal government were extended. This unanticipated funding created new opportunities to support our RisingOaks' family. As a result, the board of directors approved a number of interim financial supports for employees and families including: additional COVID-19 sick days for staff, child absence credits for families to use when their child was off isolating or testing, a shortened notice period for withdrawals and an interim camp cancellation policy.

In addition, we successfully applied for a Resilient Communities Fund grant through the Ontario Trillium Foundation to support enhanced health

and safety practices, engage in strategy development/implementation to address COVID-19 contexts, consider alternate delivery methods and build organizational resiliency.

By the time school resumed in September, full-day enrolment for infant, toddler and preschool programs had returned to pre-pandemic levels. School-age enrolment continues to fluctuate between 49% and 63% of pre-pandemic levels. With the majority of children enrolled ineligible for vaccination, after much discussion and risk assessment, a mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy was implemented requiring all employees, placement students and volunteers to be fully vaccinated by late-October or to have a valid and approved exemption under the Human Rights Code. Later in the fall, at the height of the Omicron wave, we undertook additional advocacy related to enhanced PPE (i.e., N95 masks, HEPA filters), requested clear guidance on close contact isolation requirements and advocated to bring back PCR testing and reporting for schools and child care.



Overcoming Obstacles, Thriving Through the Pandemic.

2021 also marked the end of our strategic planning cycle with the final progress report issued to the board on our three strategic priorities:

1. Advocate for Children
2. Achieve our Potential
3. Strengthen our Brand

Related to advocacy, we saw an increase in our influence and reputation as a leader in this sector and were pleased to host two Minister announcements in 2021. Both in our internal work at RisingOaks, and in external work with sector associations and partners, we continue to amplify calls for Ontario to sign a universal child care deal with the federal government and to implement a workforce strategy – including a new compensation plan to address the ongoing staffing crisis in the sector.

With a focus on achieving our potential, investments were made in pedagogical leadership, employee wellness and building capacity for diversity, equity and inclusion. Related to our expansion goals, construction is well underway on RisingOaks Early Learning | Oak Creek – our newest centre scheduled to open in September 2022, and our youth development program (YDP) continues to evolve and build on early successes. As we closed out 2021, we marked one year since the launch of our new name and visual identity as

RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario! Our new name has been well received in our community and continues to build name and brand recognition every day. The transition has generated conversation about the importance of early learning and how learning happens. It also created new opportunities – a new website, radio ads and even a jingle and our very own original song that will be launched at the upcoming AGM.

All in all, 2021 has been a great year in spite of the pandemic. We have seen children grow, develop and thrive. We have seen their sense of wonder and discovery, with the educators acting as co-learners along the way. Through play, children naturally learn about the world. From the earliest age, as children begin to interact with the world around them, they play. They test. They take risks. They tumble. They laugh. They learn. Play helps children create a world that they can begin to understand, and it leads to a world they can master. Even in the midst of a pandemic, children continued to thrive and grow through play.



By the numbers

- 8 child care centres
- 12 before/after school program locations
- 2,852 hours of service
- 2,199 summer camp weekly enrolments
- 873 children served
- 164 staff
- 76 school closure days due to COVID-19
- 125 children served by emergency child care
- 15,5170 daily screenings completed
- \$93,513 fees credited due to COVID-19 absences
- 246 COVID-19 sick days used by staff
- 7 revisions to COVID-19 policies or screening
- 13,771 hours dedicated for screening, cleaning and running
- 38 positive COVID-19 cases



Balance



Climbing



Spatial Awareness

Play in the Great Outdoors

The environment is described by Loris Malaguzzi as “the third teacher” and is valued for its power to organize, promote relationships, and educate.

The outdoor environment provides children with play opportunities that are vital to their well-being. Outdoors, nature provides and promotes a learning environment where children can freely and actively explore, investigate and engage in risky play. We are fortunate to live in a climate that provides four distinct seasons. In the winter snow enhances our learning environment. Our large muscles allow us to stomp through the mounds of snow. Spring provides a sensory environment of puddles and mud, but don't worry, we have Muddy Buddies to protect our clothing as we splish and splash. In the summer we plant gardens and harvest our crop to challenge our taste buds. Lastly, we have the beauty of fall with the sound of crunchy leaves beneath our feet. Educators don't simply rely on nature to provide the learning environment. They add additional materials, loose parts and equipment to expand the element of risk, investigation, exploration.

The educational team recently completed a survey on outdoor play. When asked what their role in outdoor play is, more than half indicated they get “down and dirty” with the children on a daily basis. When the educators role model active play, it supports children to safely test their boundaries and challenge themselves beyond yesterday's risky play.



Mixing & Measuring



Jumping



Movement

Treasurer's Report



Julia Bloom
Treasurer

On behalf of the board of directors, I am pleased to report that the board has approved the 2021 audited financial statements produced by BDO LLP. BDO has reported that the consolidated financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of RisingOaks Early Learning as of December 31, 2021, and the results of its operations and cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

The approved budget for 2021 projected an unprecedented deficit of \$1,017,000 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The board of directors anticipated lower enrollment numbers with a significant reduction in revenues, as well as added expenses in staff and supply costs required to support COVID-19 safety protocols. While the 2021 budget included some known government supports, significant unanticipated funding was received later in the year.

In 2021 we saw the start of recovery from COVID-19 impacts. Child care revenues started to increase, though remain below the pre-pandemic levels. We were thankful to have access to funding of \$893,000 in support through the federal government's Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy and Canadian Emergency Rent Subsidy programs. In addition, we also received \$1.7M in sustainability funding related to COVID-19 recovery. This extraordinary funding resulted in an additional \$2,653,765 in revenues to support employment and operations.

As a result, RisingOaks ended the year with a surplus of \$1,200,000.

As we look ahead, RisingOaks remains committed to playground improvements to support child development and nature-based learning. Further to that, the board approved an increase of the Playground Improvement Fund to a total of \$650,000, in anticipation that these funds will enable RisingOaks to proceed with playground improvement initiatives in 2022 and beyond.

At the time of this report, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve. The Ontario government is presently working towards lifting many COVID-19 restrictions. While the pandemic appears to be moving in a favourable direction at the present time, long-term projections remain uncertain and will depend on the severity and impact of potential new COVID-19 variants. In addition, school-age enrolment remains well below pre-pandemic levels, as families have adjusted to remote work and new routines. This may have a longer-term effect on future operations at RisingOaks Early Learning.

Your board of directors remains vigilant in monitoring RisingOaks' financial stability and liquidity; preparing for ongoing uncertainty as the pandemic continues to evolve. To safeguard the organization, the Board had increased the Risk Management Fund to \$600,000 and the Pandemic Recovery Fund to \$1,600,000 to support ongoing pandemic-related recovery costs.

Fiscal Year	Total Revenue	Total Expense	Surplus/Deficit	Notes
2021 Actual	\$11,763,120	\$10,542,623	\$1,220,497	Over \$2.65M was received in provincial/ federal government supports due to COVID-19. Revenue from child care fees was up 73% from 2020, yet remains below pre-pandemic levels.
2021 Budget	\$9,099,286	\$10,117,074	(\$1,017,000)	An extraordinary deficit was approved in anticipation of a continued reduction in enrolment, ongoing COVID-19 expenses but limited government funding supports known at the time of approval.
2020 Actual	\$9,929,611	\$8,924,729	\$1,004,882	Revenue from child care fees was down 47% due to the impacts of COVID-19. Over \$3M was received in federal/provincial supports.

View the full Audited Financial Statements at: <https://risingoaks.ca/agm>



RisingOaks
Early Learning

Locations

Centre Locations

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