

# Annual Report 2025



community



advocacy



creativity



love



learning

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# Land Acknowledgment

RisingOaks Early Learning centers and programs are situated on the lands within the Haldimand Treaty of 1784, a formally ratified agreement acknowledging six miles on either side of the Grand River as treaty territory belonging to Six Nations of the Grand River.

Waterloo region is located within the traditional territories of the Anishinaabe, Chonnonton and Haudenosaunee peoples. This territory is within the lands protected by the Dish with One Spoon Covenant - a peace agreement made between Indigenous nations before the Europeans arrived. The “dish” represents the land that is to be shared peacefully and the “spoon” represents the individuals living on and using the resources of the land in a spirit of mutual co-operation. The covenant characterizes our collective responsibility to each other and Mother Earth - we should take only what we need, leave enough for others and keep the dish clean. By acknowledging this covenant and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit, we are reminded of our important connection to this land where we live, learn and work together as a community.

Today, Waterloo Region is home to Indigenous people from many distinct First Nations, as well as Métis and Inuit.

We acknowledge the enduring presence, knowledges and philosophies of Indigenous Peoples living here today. We acknowledge the continuing accomplishments and contributions Indigenous Peoples make in shaping our sector, our region, our province and country.

Acknowledging the land is only a single, but important, step in the larger context of building relationships and ally-ship, and fulfilling our responsibilities to truth and reconciliation, especially in our context where we see continued acts of colonization against Indigenous peoples in Canada.



# Chair's Message

## Listening, Learning and Leading Together

At RisingOaks Early Learning, we believe strong communities are built when people feel heard, valued, and connected. As a board of directors, we carry this belief into our governance work, stewarding the organization thoughtfully while remaining attentive to the needs and perspectives of the families, educators, and communities we serve.

Listening is essential to strong leadership. When we take the time to understand different perspectives, we create space for better decisions and stronger relationships. This mindset continues to shape the board's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. Welcoming a range of voices and experiences strengthens our governance and helps RisingOaks serve children, families, and educators in ways that reflect the diversity of our community.

The early learning and child care sector continues to evolve under the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care system, bringing both opportunity and uncertainty. In this environment, the board plays an important role in monitoring risk and ensuring the organization remains resilient. Through thoughtful oversight, we work to ensure RisingOaks continues to navigate change in a way that protects quality, supports our team, and sustains our mission for the long term.

This year also marked an important milestone with the opening of RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick, expanding access to high-quality early learning and care for families in our community. Two additional expansion projects are now underway. These opportunities reflect years of relationship building and careful planning. Expansion is about more than creating new spaces. It is about ensuring that quality, culture, and support for our team remain strong as RisingOaks grows.

In October 2025, the board gathered for a strategic think tank to reflect on RisingOaks' progress and the changing environment around us. Through thoughtful dialogue with leadership, we approved a revised and extended strategic plan that will guide the organization through 2028 and support our work in an expanding sector.



RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick

Thank you to my fellow board members, the leadership team, and staff whose dedication brings RisingOaks' mission to life. Most importantly, thank you to the families and children who trust us to be part of your lives.

When we listen to one another, learn together, and lead with compassion, we create spaces where everyone truly belongs.



*Jessica Ronzio*

Chair, Board of Directors

# Board of Directors



**Jessica Ronzio**  
Chair



**Robert MacDonald**  
Vice-Chair



**Christiana Alkiviades**  
Treasurer



**Julia Bloom**  
Past Chair



**Alex Zhou**  
Director



**Bernie Crawford**  
Director



**Christel Wu**  
Director



**Cindy Ofunne**  
Director



**Necia Martins**  
Director



**Katherine Walsh**  
Director



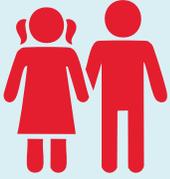
**Alisha Michiels**  
Director



**Lori Prospero**  
CEO, Secretary

Members of the volunteer board of directors at RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario play a crucial role in our organization by actively participating in the organization's mission and objectives. This dedicated group, including parents of children in our programs and community members of diverse backgrounds, contributes their expertise to advance the goals of the organization, fostering a collaborative environment that benefits both RisingOaks and the wider communities in which we serve.

# By the Numbers



**1,585**

Children Enrolled



**1,325**

Families Served



**277**

Employees



**111**

Placement Students



**2,841**

Program Hours



**56**

Members



**26**

Board/Committee Volunteers



**430**

Government Relations Touchpoints



**367,862**

Healthy Meals & Snacks served



**\$11,560,350**

CWELCC Funding Received



**402**

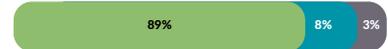
Campers

Satisfaction/  
Net Promotor Score

**86**

(up 6% from 2024)

- Promoters
- Passives
- Detractors



Children, their parents, educators and staff belong here. We nurture our community so that everyone who is part of it feels at home. This creates a safe and harmonious place to learn.

# CEO's Message

## Strength For Today, Capacity For Tomorrow

2025 was a year of meaningful progress for RisingOaks Early Learning, as we continued to strengthen our organization while preparing for the future. This has been a year that has required both focus and flexibility, as we continue to learn and adapt within a changing system.

This year we made important progress on the priorities that guide our strategic plan. Across the organization, teams have been working thoughtfully to strengthen programs, support educators, and build capacity for continued growth.



DEIB Family Night at RisingOaks

RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick

The opening of RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick marked an important milestone, expanding access to high-quality early learning and care in our community. With two additional expansion projects underway, we continue to grow in ways that are intentional and grounded in quality.

We also strengthened the foundations that support our team. In 2025, RisingOaks moved ahead with full implementation of a new ten-step wage grid for educators, an important step toward professional pay and decent work. At the same time, we remained focused on employee well-being.

Through ongoing efforts to reduce burnout and support employee well-being, we continue to build an environment where educators can do their best work. As Kristine, our director of operations, says, “after all, the educators’ working environment is the childrens’ learning environment”.

Another area of meaningful progress has been our work in diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. This year, RisingOaks launched its first DEIB Action Plan, shaped through collaboration across the organization. This work is ongoing, with leadership from co-chairs Emily Rattray and Velvet Corlette, and it is already shaping how we think, lead, and show up for one another across the organization.

Our commitment to quality remains central. In 2025, our continuous improvement work focused on nature-based pedagogy, supporting children’s curiosity and exploration in our natural playgrounds. This work reflects our belief that how children learn is just as important as what they learn. Kristine shares more about this work in her report.

Thank you to the amazing team at RisingOaks Early Learning for the care and professionalism you bring each day, and to the families for the trust you place in us.

As we look ahead, we remain focused on creating the conditions where children, educators, and communities continue to thrive and feel a strong sense of belonging.



*Lori Prospero*, CAE  
Chief Executive Officer

# Advocating for You - A Year in Socials



As leaders supporting children's growth and development, RisingOaks continues to be a strong voice. We are dedicated to quality education, affordability, and accessibility for all learners.

This past year we met with politicians, sent petitions and advocated for change to the child care system. All while making sure that, internally, we represented the wonderful diversity that's within our community. Here is a brief summary of the work we've undertaken on behalf of our community.



CARE COUNTS  
 October 21, 2025

# Director's Message

## Strengthening Practice Through Nature Pedagogy

RisingOaks Early Learning continued to strengthen its commitment to reflective practice and high-quality pedagogy in 2025 through an organization-wide continuous improvement project. This year's focus was on nature pedagogy. We partnered with the educational team at Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds to provide a mentorship approach to learning. The team at Bienenstock started our journey with a pre-recorded training session that was shown at our April 21, 2025 professional development day. Next the Bienenstock team visited each of our locations to support educators and children as they explored, experimented and developed their capabilities within the purpose-built structures of our natural playgrounds and with the 'loose parts' that they brought.



Pedagogical Learning at RisingOaks

Through this initiative, educators were encouraged to reimagine their playgrounds as dynamic learning environments rather than simply spaces to burn off energy. With guidance from the Bienenstock team, staff explored ways to enhance underutilized areas of the playground and incorporate open-ended materials that invite creativity, problem solving, and collaboration. As a result, many centres introduced new materials and provocations outdoors, such as ramps, water play elements, space to swing or balance using ratchet straps and creative building opportunities that extend children's play and inquiry.

Research tells us that nature play is an essential part of child development. Learning outdoors introduces purposeful and safe risk-taking opportunities. By simply adding two ratchet straps (or slacklines) between two whackyposts educators have created a place for children to develop core strength, their balance and motor planning (i.e., the process of organizing and executing unfamiliar multi-step physical action). Educators also use ratchet straps and a board or wide stick to create a simple dual child swing. By doing this they have created a place for motor planning, core strength and social engagement.

Through this pedagogy project the educational team gained knowledge and experience in creating the recipe for a successful outdoor learning environment that naturally supports and promotes motor skills, social skills, language development, self-regulation and cognitive development

This is our ingredient list for an outdoor learning environment:

- A cup of opportunities for big body play
- A cup of opportunities for sensory input
- A heaping cup of places to solve problems
- Gallons of water
- Yards of sand

This recipe is sure to help children achieve developmental milestones but most importantly enjoy the process of learning so much that they don't even know that's what is happening!



*Kristine Parsons*, RECE

Director of Operations

# Changing the World Starts with Care



The roots of lifelong happiness and resilience develop in early childhood

~ Rachel Robertson



“If you trust play, you will not have to control your child’s development as much. Play will raise the child in ways you can never imagine.”

~ Vince Gowmon



“You really can change the world if you care enough.”

~ Marian Wright Edelman



“Since the jobs that our preschoolers will do probably don’t exist yet, our priority is to teach them the skills to adapt and inquire and question and cooperate...life skills. So much more useful than rigid concepts such as the alphabet.”

~ Caroline Bellouse



“Love is the supreme form of communication. In the hierarchy of needs, love stands as the supreme developing agent of the humanity of the person. As such, the teaching of love should be the central core of all early childhood curriculum with all other subjects growing naturally out of such teaching.”

~ Ashley Montagu



Children more than ever, need opportunities to be in their bodies in the world – jumping rope, bicycling, stream hopping, and fort building. It’s this engagement between limbs of the body and bones of the earth where true balance and centeredness emerge.”

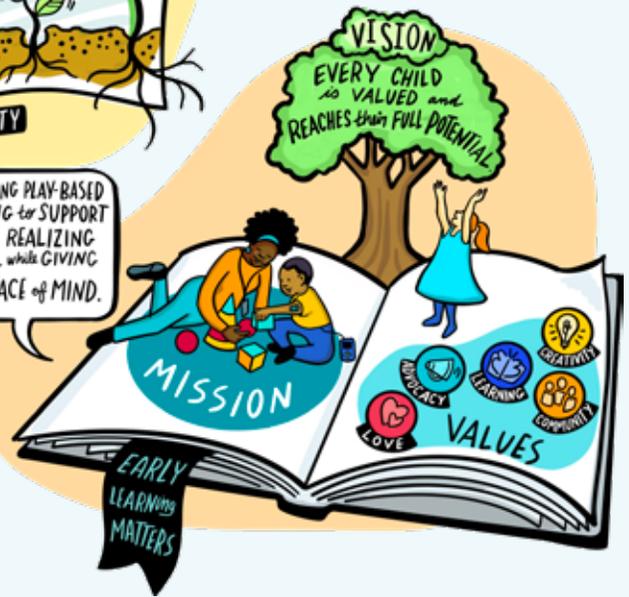
~ David Sobel

# We Embody Our Values Everyday

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2028



PROVIDE NURTURING PLAY-BASED EARLY LEARNING TO SUPPORT EACH CHILD IN REALIZING THEIR POTENTIAL WHILE GIVING FAMILIES PEACE OF MIND.



advocacy



love

community

creativity

learning



# Treasurer's Report

## Strong Stewardship in a Year of Sector Change

In 2025, RisingOaks Early Learning marked its first year operating under Ontario's new cost-based funding model within the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system. During this year of transition, the organization remained financially stable while continuing to invest in its workforce and expanding access to licensed child care through the opening of RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick.

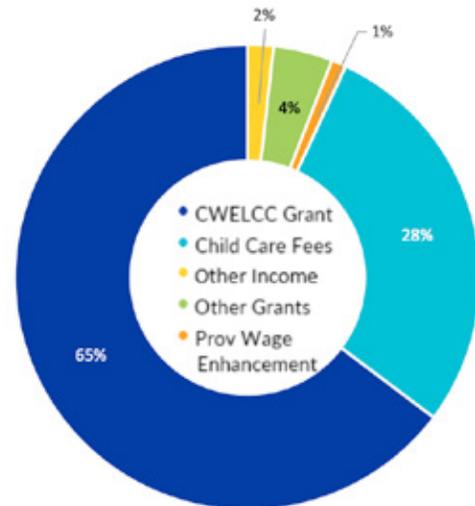
As part of this model, not-for-profit operators receive an allocation in lieu of profit or surplus. This recognizes that organizations require a modest operating margin to manage risk, invest in quality, and plan responsibly for the future. The RisingOaks board may approve the use of this allocation to enhance program quality, advance strategic priorities, or strengthen reserves that support long-term sustainability.

Total revenue for 2025 was \$17.5 million, compared with \$14.1 million in 2024, reflecting the continued expansion of the child care system and additional funding to support workforce investments and growth. Total expenses were \$16.0 million, with wages and benefits totaling \$12.9 million, representing the largest portion of organizational spending.

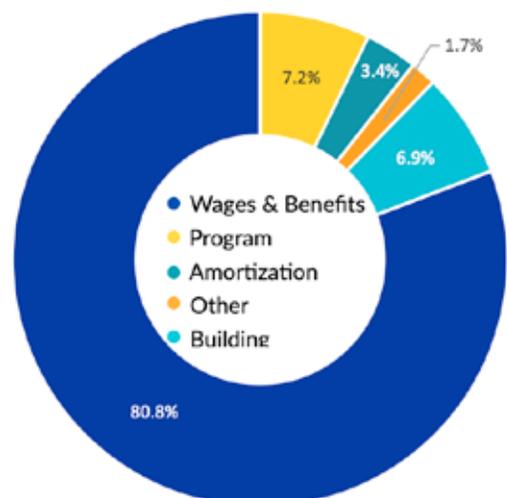


Staff at RisingOaks Early Learning

### 2025 Sources of Revenue



### 2025 Expense Distribution



# Treasurer's Report

## Strong Stewardship in a Year of Sector Change

RisingOaks ended the 2025 year with an excess of revenues over expenses of \$1.24 million, the majority of which reflects the allocation provided within the CWELCC funding formula in lieu of profit or surplus. RisingOaks prepares financial statements on an accrual basis, and ongoing operations are funded through current year revenues. Surplus funds are reinvested to strengthen long-term sustainability and support one-time investments such as expansion, capital improvements, and start-up costs associated with opening new centres, consistent with the board's strategic direction.

In 2025, RisingOaks made several strategic investments aligned with these priorities. The organization opened RisingOaks Early Learning | St. Patrick, expanding access to licensed child care within the Waterloo Region. RisingOaks also implemented a new 10-step wage grid, supporting recruitment and retention while advancing progress toward professional pay and decent work in the early learning sector.

The board has approved the audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2025. Hilborn LLP concluded that the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario in accordance with Canadian accounting standards for not-for-profit organizations.

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



*Christiana Alkiviades, CPA*

Treasurer

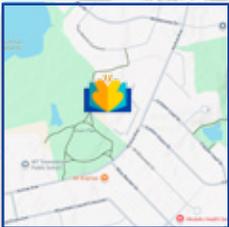
### Year-over-year Results by the Millions



	Total Revenue	Total Expense	Surplus/Deficit
2025	\$17,542,372	\$16,049,451	\$1,242,511
2024	\$14,640,883	\$14,214,933	\$425,950
2023	\$13,350,532	\$13,350,532	\$310,884



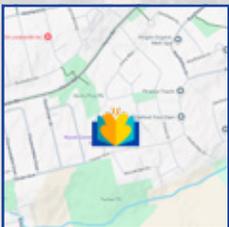
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2-10 Washburn Drive,  
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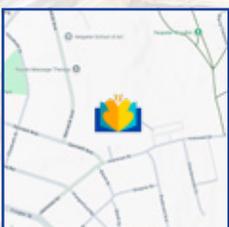
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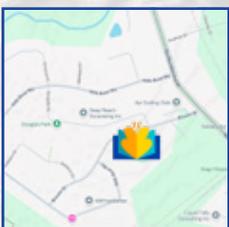
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lincoln@RisingOaks.ca



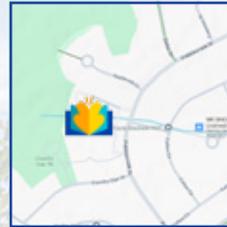
**Oak Creek**  
80 Tartan Avenue  
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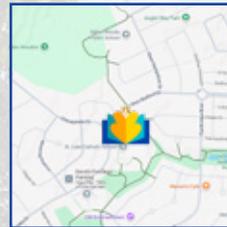
**Our Lady of Fatima**  
55 Hammet Street  
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olf@RisingOaks.ca



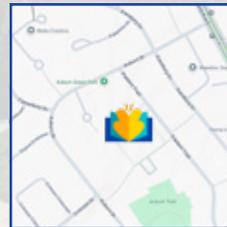
**St. Brigid**  
50 Broom Street  
Ayr, Ontario N0B 1E0  
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stbrigid@RisingOaks.ca



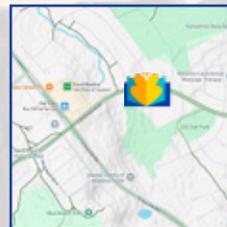
**Saint John Paul II**  
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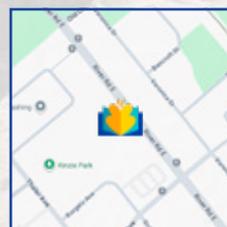
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