

Vermont's Child Care Campaign

IMPACT REPORT
2015-2025

LED BY LET'S GROW KIDS IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH LET'S GROW KIDS ACTION NETWORK





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Photos clockwise from top left: ABC & LOL Child Care center & Preschool, St. Johnsbury; Cheers to Child Care Celebration, Williston; Kids Out Loud, Burlington; Robin's Nest Children's Center, Burlington

My friends,

Ten years ago, Let's Grow Kids launched a historic campaign to transform Vermont's child care system. Through strategic grantmaking, community organizing, advocacy, program support, and policy change, we've done just that. **This campaign defined what it means to use philanthropy as a catalyst for social change. Your generosity and leadership laid the foundation for a statewide movement that proved just how powerful urgency, accountability, and persistence can be when harnessed together around a shared goal.**

Over the last decade, you've helped build a movement of over 42,000 Vermonters, who have come together to make clear: child care is essential!

Among the images from the past 10 years that I will never forget is the snapshot of kids in capes standing on the steps of the state house rallying with over a thousand Vermonters for child care change. I can't think of a better symbol of our work together. Those joyful images serve as an important reminder of the power of collective action and our commitment to growing Vermont's future.

Together our efforts helped pass Act 76, Vermont's groundbreaking child care law. With over \$100 million in annual public funding, Act 76 is changing the trajectory of our state. In just two years, the law is already lowering child care costs for thousands of families, increasing compensation for early childhood educators, allowing new programs to open, and existing programs to expand. Thousands of new child care spaces are being created, including in some of Vermont's most rural communities.

Now, we're finally seeing just how powerful public investment is for transforming our child care system and putting Vermont on a stronger path. During Let's Grow Kids' planned wind down, we have been intentional in supporting a strong child care ecosystem that will build on the progress we've made together. **The work is not finished — but as we enter the next phase of the campaign, our incredible system partners, child care programs, and advocates will continue to build on the progress we've made together.**

There are countless people to thank for this campaign's success. Thank you for sharing your trust, your time, your talent, and your fierce dedication to Vermont's children and families. While Let's Grow Kids comes to an end, our mission remains as vital as ever. Child care is essential. And so are you. Thank you.

With gratitude, **onward!**

Aly Richards

CEO, LET'S GROW KIDS
BOARD CHAIR, LET'S GROW KIDS ACTION NETWORK



Prequel

Laying the Foundation for Let's Grow Kids (2000–2015)

Let's Grow Kids as an organization and advocacy campaign would not have been possible without the early childhood educators and advocates who had been on the ground organizing for decades in Vermont. Before we dive in and celebrate our successful 10-year child care campaign, we must first recognize the work that came before.

In 2000, Vermont philanthropists Rick Davis and Carl Ferenbach started The Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children, a strategic grantmaking organization supporting young Vermonters. Reflection and community inquiry by the founders led the organization to focus on birth to five, when children's brains are developing rapidly, and they are establishing the social, emotional, and academic foundation they will build upon over the course of their lives. They narrowed their focus to quality early childhood education, which is key to laying the groundwork for lifelong success. Through deep relationship building with early childhood educators, the founders recognized that Vermont's early childhood education system was an underfunded—and disconnected—patchwork of organizations struggling to meet the needs of children and families. To improve early childhood education and care, systems level change was needed,

Starting in 2005, the Permanent Fund partnered with Vermont philanthropists, communities, school leaders, and early educators to expand access to prekindergarten (Pre-K) as the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC). Through community partnerships, philanthropic support, and technical assistance, Pre-K enrollment grew from 20% to 75% in schools, center-based programs, and family child care homes across the state. This proved both the demand for and feasibility of statewide Pre-K, creating a tipping point that prompted lawmakers to act. This community partnership helped draft and pass Act 166, making Vermont the first state to offer universal PreK to both 3- and 4-year-olds. Today, Vermont is the leading state in Pre-K enrollment for 3- and 4-year-olds.

This initiative was the foundation for what would become Let's Grow Kids. The success of VCPC helped solidify a collaborative of funders who saw the far-reaching potential of investing together in early childhood education systems change. **By identifying levers for policy change, utilizing philanthropy to prepare the early childhood education system for sustainable funding, and building trust and partnerships across communities, we saw the power of public investment and its potential to transform the full birth-to-five system in Vermont.**

In 2014, Rick, and the board of the Permanent Fund, realized that to secure systems change, we needed a public awareness, mission-oriented campaign to educate Vermonters on the critical importance of child care. **In 2015, Let's Grow Kids formally launched a 10-year campaign to secure affordable access to quality child care for all Vermont families by 2025.**

Our Impact

Thanks to your support, we have never been closer to fulfilling the shared vision of quality child care that meets the needs of Vermonters, is affordable to families, and fairly compensates the professional workforce of early educators doing the essential work of preparing our youngest children for lifelong success.

Affordability

Helping families afford quality child care through Vermont's child care tuition assistance program (CCFAP).



OVER 4,700 MORE CHILDREN (A 63% INCREASE) ENROLLED IN CCFAP since Act 76 changes went into effect.

An increase the income eligibility limit for CCFAP from 200% of the federal poverty level to **575% OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL.**

ELIGIBILITY FOR CCFAP EXPANDED to include families who are not U.S. citizens, caregivers who are pursuing a wide range of training or education, and more people who are self-employed.

¹National Institute for Early Education Research. (2025). The State of Preschool.

Access

Creating child care spaces across the state to meet demand.



MAKE WAY FOR KIDS has granted over \$10.7M to child care programs, creating nearly 7,000 spaces in all 14 counties.

Since Act 76 went into effect, **MORE CHILD CARE PROGRAMS HAVE OPENED THAN CLOSED** every quarter; a first since we started tracking in 2018.

Vermont is ranked the **#1 STATE IN THE NATION** for access to publicly-funded pre-K for both 3- and 4-year olds.¹

²Rate increases vary based on age of child and program type; family child care homes have seen the largest increases (237-255%)

Quality

The number one indicator of quality early childhood education is the professional qualifications of the educator.



In 2025, a bill recommending that early childhood education become a licensed profession **PASSED IN THE SENATE AND HEADS TO THE HOUSE IN 2026.**

Since LGK began advocating for increased investments in CCFAP, **REIMBURSEMENT RATES HAVE INCREASED UP TO 255%**, providing programs with more funding to invest in staff and services.²

According to a 2024 national survey, **79% OF VERMONT CHILD CARE DIRECTORS AND OWNERS REPORTED THAT THEY HAD RAISED WAGES IN THE PAST YEAR** — compared to 51% nationally.³

³NAEYC national workforce survey from 2024

For every \$1 invested in Vermont's Child Care Campaign, we secured an additional \$3.36 in increased public investment in child care. This includes an additional \$163.5M in ongoing state funding for Vermont's child care system.

A Decade of Progress

In 2015, Let's Grow Kids launched a 10-year campaign to secure affordable access to quality child care for all Vermont families by 2025.

LET'S GROW KIDS
Action Network
CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

2020

The Blue-Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care is created.

Act 166 is fully implemented, providing 10 hours a week for 35 weeks a year of publicly funded preK for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

Kids Out Loud rally; 1,000 Vermonters march and sing along to the campaign anthem "Something Beautiful" on Church Street Marketplace in Burlington.



Make Way for Kids begins, providing grants and technical assistance to child care programs for start up and expansion.

H.531, a key child care bill with 79 sponsors from across the political spectrum, passes in the House in March 2019. In June 2019 Governor Phil Scott signs into law a historic investment of \$7.4M into Vermont's child care system, a down payment toward an equitable birth to five education system in Vermont.

Let's Grow Kids Action Network (LGKAN), a 501(c)4 organization, launches to support advocacy, and hold policymakers accountable to child care progress.

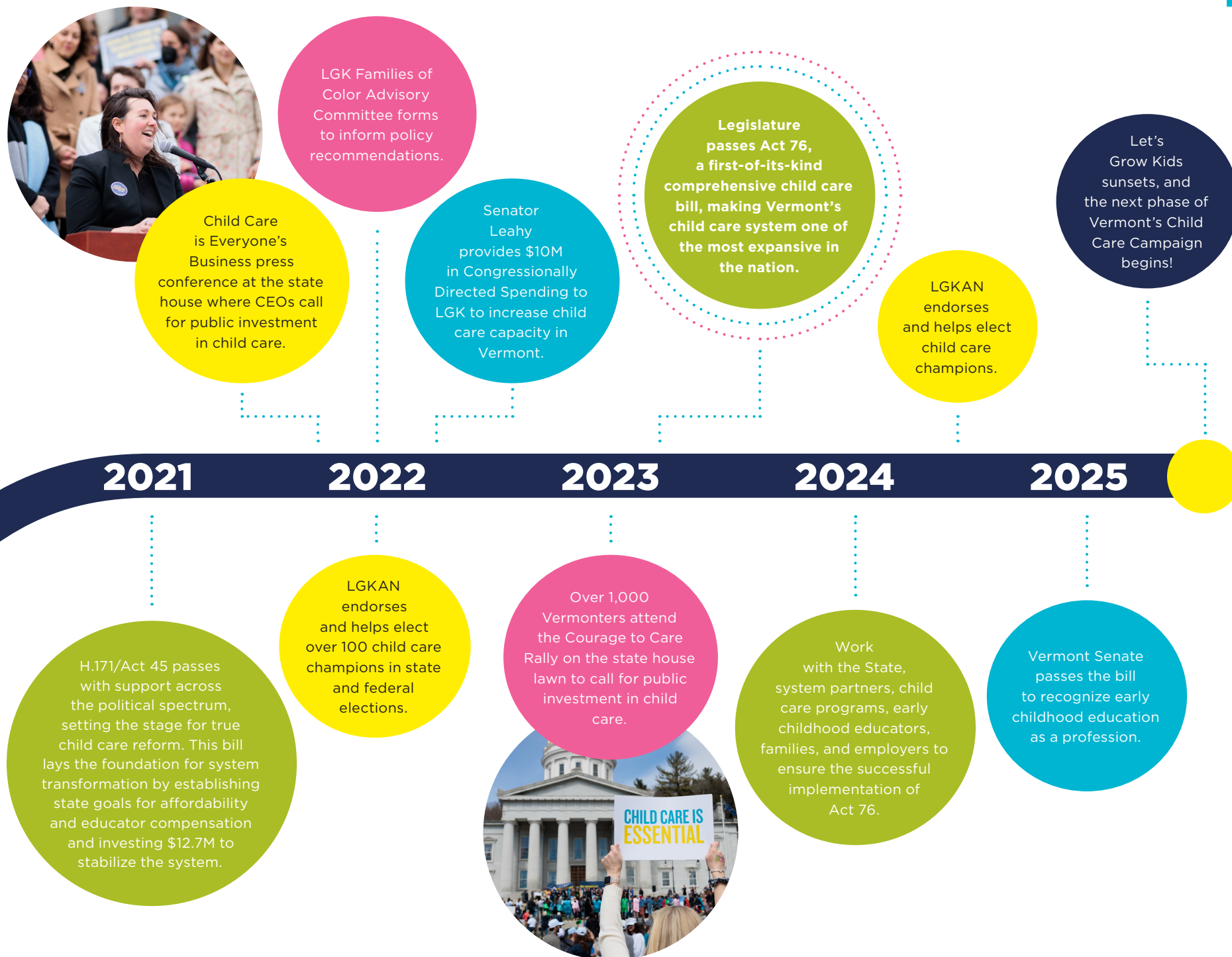
First Stalled at the Start report is created to track child care supply across Vermont.

Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up Summit convened Vermonters to envision the future child care system.

Building Vermont's Future from the Child Up Think Tank distilled the vision into actionable next steps.

Rally for Kids on the state house lawn to call for public investment.

COVID-19 brings the child care crisis to light nationally. Let's Grow Kids provides emergency support and supplies to child care programs.



Program Sustainability

Your partnership helped strengthen Vermont's child care system.

Our investment in strengthening early childhood education programs helped prepare Vermont's child care system for public investment by increasing capacity, growing and supporting the workforce, and ensuring quality. **Many pilots launched by Let's Grow Kids used philanthropy to demonstrate the impact of a better resourced child care system. These pilots have transitioned into publicly funded, sustainable programs led by First Children's Finance (FCF) and the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) that continue to expand quality child care capacity and grow the early childhood education workforce.**

Building Capacity: Through Make Way for Kids, Let's Grow Kids expanded capacity with grants and technical assistance, creating nearly 7,000 new child care spaces statewide. By offering business coaching, shared services, and training for child care owners and administrators, we showed how programs become more financially stable—an approach that led to the development of Vermont's Child Care Business and Technical Assistance Program (BTAP). Since 2023, the BTAP, administered by FCF, has supported 57% of Vermont's child care businesses.

Strengthening the Workforce: A strong system that ensures access for families also depends on a well-supported, well-prepared workforce. Staffing has long been a bottleneck to expanding capacity, so we prioritized recruitment, training, retention, and advancement opportunities. Since 2015, more than 2,100 early educators have participated in LGK-supported professional development. We also expanded scholarships, tuition repayment, professional bonuses and promoted early childhood education as a viable career pathway. Together with VTAEYC's leadership and field-led advocacy, Vermont became a leader in advancing early childhood education as a recognized and fairly compensated profession. VTAEYC is poised to continue supporting and growing the early childhood education workforce.

MEETING THE MOMENT

While focused on strengthening the child care system, Let's Grow Kids also responded to urgent needs, most notably during the COVID-19 pandemic and 2023 flooding. While long-term system change is the goal, rapid response remains essential to sustaining Vermont's child care infrastructure. Partners like the Vermont Community Foundation will continue to be responsive in these situations.

Ensuring Quality: In 2008, we created a comprehensive child care mentoring program. Through this project, Let's Grow Kids was responsible for elevating the participation rates of registered family child care homes in the STARS quality rating system from 15% to 74% by 2017, which helped pave the way to make participation in the quality recognition system compulsory in 2023. This program laid the foundation for Vermont's System for Program Access to Resources for Quality (SPARQS), a program funded by the State and administered by VTAEYC.

These initiatives will continue to grow a child care system that ensures all Vermont families can access high-quality early childhood education led by trained, supported, and fairly compensated educators.



People Power

Your advocacy transformed Vermont's child care system and continues to shape Vermont's future.

Let's Grow Kids trained and supported advocates to speak courageously, persuasively, and strategically to lawmakers, the media, and the public. Backed by in-depth research and the legislative advocacy expertise of staff, our statewide network of supporters were the ones out front, pushing their representatives to support proven and sustainable solutions to support access to quality, affordable child care. **The over 42,000 supporters of this movement are meeting with lawmakers, sharing their stories with the media, and mobilizing their communities. They are the ones driving change at the State House — and impacting thousands of lives across Vermont. They are the heart and soul of this movement.**

Even as our state and the country face unprecedented challenges and uncertainty over this last decade, these grassroots advocates have shown Vermont and the nation what's possible. **Let's Grow Kids' volunteers are living proof that determined people can influence government through collective will and relationship building.** At a time when many Americans feel powerless to effect change — and some are deeply concerned about the health of their democracy — we want to take a moment to celebrate the instances when democracy actually works to improve the lives of its community members.

Photos from top: 4th of July Parade, Brandon; King Street Center, Burlington; Courage to Care Rally, Montpelier



42,355

CAMPAIGN SUPPORTERS:

333 employers endorsed the campaign, calling for public investment in child care.

647 campaign leaders across sectors serving as donors, spokespeople, organizers, work group and advisory committee members.

4,901 ECEs engaged in the campaign. Today's ECE workforce is estimated to be around 6,000 individuals.

13,000 Vermonters attended over **570** campaign events, totaling more than **190,000** hours of engagement.

22,447 contacts to legislators since 2021.



“

The best part of my experience volunteering with LGK was the way **so many people worked together to achieve a common goal.**”

LET'S GROW KIDS ADVOCATE

“

I was incredibly grateful to be asked to share my story with the legislature — it felt **empowering, affirming, and helpful toward change in our community.**”

LET'S GROW KIDS ADVOCATE

“

Even though the work isn't 100% completed, **through LGK we sharpened our advocacy skills, gained confidence, and made so many connections in all areas of our communities** that we will be able to successfully continue the mission through other partner agencies and within our own spheres of influence.”

LIZ ROCHEFORT
Parent Advocate



Photos from top left: Courage to Care Rally, Montpelier; Mountain View Child Care, North Troy; Robin's Nest Children's Center, Burlington

Policy Change

Since 2015, Vermont's Child Care Campaign secured over \$251M in additional public funds for Vermont's child care system.

Starting in 2016, Vermonters helped shape a vision for child care through forums and surveys, informing the Blue-Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care, Summit, and Think Tank, creating a statewide blueprint for a high-quality, affordable system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Let's Grow Kids supported policymakers in protecting the child care system through emergency response and recovery efforts.

In 2021, Vermont passed Act 45 (H.171), a landmark bill that invested \$12.7M to stabilize the system, and launched a financing study to chart a path toward sustainable public funding. In 2022 policy experts built on this work and the Let's Grow Kids Action Network helped elect over 100 child care champions to the Legislature—laying the groundwork for cross-partisan support of Act 76.

In 2023, Vermont passed Act 76, a first-of-its-kind comprehensive child care law, making the state's child care system one of the most expansive in the nation. This victory followed years of work with policymakers to understand brain science, define the crisis, and demonstrate the benefits of public investment. The campaign's urgency and clear metrics for success helped hold lawmakers accountable and build the political will necessary for bold action.

In 2024, the focus was on the implementation of Act 76 and continuing the progress made; Let's Grow Kids Action Network endorsed 156 candidates statewide as child care champions to continue this work. 2025 brought a challenging climate with uncertainty around federal funding and complex fiscal challenges for our state, but our lawmakers continued to prioritize progress on child care. Vermont's Child Care Campaign was successful in protecting Act 76 funding, increasing access and affordability for families, and strengthening the early childhood education workforce.

LEGISLATIVE CHILD CARE CHAMPS

- **289** candidates endorsed as child care champions since 2022
- **155** legislators (81% of Legislature) voted for Act 76
- **In 2025**, all but one member of the Vermont State Senate voted in favor of passing legislation to establish Early Childhood Education as a recognized profession

IMPLEMENTING AND PROTECTING ACT 76

Act 76 went into effect in the summer of 2023, and the last two years have been focused on successful implementation and ensuring it continues to meet the needs of Vermont families long-term.

Since the passage of Act 76, Vermont has gained:

- **More than 100 new child care programs**
- **Over 1,700 new spaces for children**
- **Nearly 400 new early childhood educator jobs**

In 2024, the Legislature amended the language in statute to ensure that any child who qualifies for child care tuition assistance from the state will receive financial assistance, protecting from loss of access due to state budget adjustments. During the 2025 legislative session, the Campaign was successful in both protecting annual child care funding from Act 76, while also expanding the system through a 5% increase in reimbursement rates to child care programs specifically for infants and toddlers.

Since October 2024, families making up to 575% of the federal poverty level (\$184,862 for a family of four in 2025) are eligible for tuition assistance, and eligibility was expanded for families working towards higher education degrees and job training programs.



Photos from top: 2019 Rally for Kids, Montpelier; 2023 Courage to Care Rally, Montpelier

THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROFESSION BILL

The professional qualifications of a child's early childhood educator are the number one indicator of quality in that child's early experiences. When achieved, licensure will offer transparency for families and hiring directors, clearly accessible career pathways for early childhood educators, consistent professional standards, and better outcomes for children entering kindergarten. Growing the workforce is essential to increasing child care spaces to meet demand.

Since 2018, the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) has led the Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Profession initiative, supporting educators in creating a recognized profession. From 2018–2022, the Advancing Task Force engaged Vermont's early childhood education workforce through 2,500+ individual interactions.

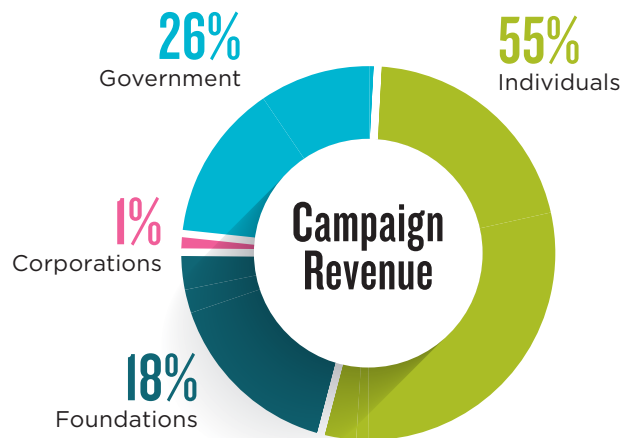
In 2024, VTAEYC submitted a Sunrise Review application to Vermont's Office of Professional Regulation (OPR). In 2025, OPR recommended that early childhood education become a licensed profession. **A bill that would make OPR's recommendation a law passed in the Senate in 2025 and is heading to the House in 2026.**

Financials

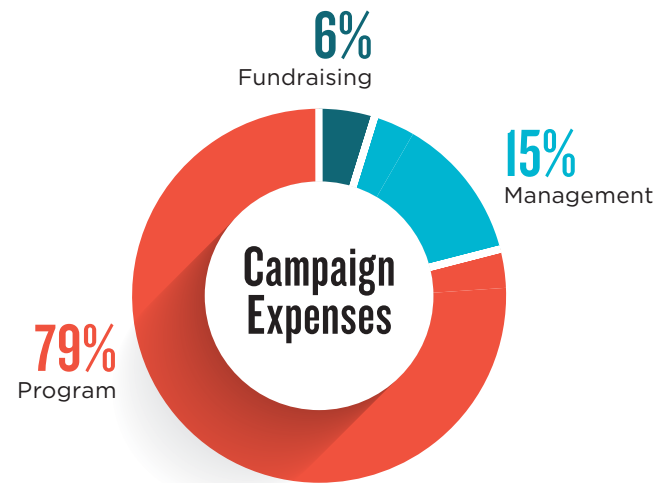
Thank you to the 1,296 donors who contributed to Vermont's Child Care Campaign since 2015, raising nearly \$76.9M. **For every dollar invested in Let's Grow Kids since 2015, the return to Vermont's kids, families, early childhood educators, and communities was \$3.36 in increased public investment in child care. This includes an additional \$163.5M in ongoing state funding.**

The financial detail below reflects campaign revenue and expenses across both Let's Grow Kids (501(c)(3)) and Let's Grow Kids Action Network (501(c)(4)) campaign activities from January 1, 2015 through June 30, 2025.

Campaign revenue totaled \$76,954,292.85, of which 3% was raised to support Let's Grow Kids Action Network (501(c)(4)) campaign activities starting in 2020. Campaign expenses totaled \$76,951,280.59, of which 3% supported Let's Grow Kids Action Network (501(c)(4)).



INDIVIDUALS	\$42,120,530.70
FOUNDATIONS	\$14,168,089.78
CORPORATIONS	\$949,022.74
GOVERNMENT	\$19,707,649.63
GRANTS & CONTRACTS	
	\$76,954,292.85



FUNDRAISING	\$4,641,505.40
MANAGEMENT	\$11,198,680.45
PROGRAM	\$61,111,094.74
	\$76,951,280.59

FOR VERMONTERS, BY VERMONTERS

- **1,503** donors contributed to the campaign since 2000. **90%** of donors have a Vermont address, representing **63%** of the state's municipalities, and **all 14 counties**.
- **66%** of donors have taken an advocacy action like contacting their legislator or attending an event.

INVESTING BACK INTO VERMONT



Photos from top left: Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development, Brattleboro; King Street Center, Burlington; Robin's Nest Children's Center, Burlington

REINVESTING IN VERMONT'S CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

From 2015 to 2025, Let's Grow Kids awarded **605** grants, totaling nearly **\$28M**; 38% of revenue was reinvested directly into child care programs as grants to open new programs, expand capacity of programs, and improve quality. These grants helped to model the impact of and prepare the system for long-term public investment.

This includes **\$10M** in congressionally directed spending from Senator Patrick Leahy for child care infrastructure. This funding allowed for investment in critical capital projects, workforce development initiatives, and improving child care business efficiency. Grantees include Otter Creek Child Center in Middlebury, the Montessori School of Central Vermont in Barre, the Woodlands Campus of the Orange County Parent Child Center in Randolph, VTAEYC for workforce recruitment and professionalization, and FCF for child care business planning and a feasibility study for a Child Care Accessibility Fund. The construction projects will result in over **180** new spaces.



CONTINUING TO MAKE WAY FOR KIDS

In 2018, Let's Grow Kids launched Make Way for Kids with an annual goal of creating 500 high-quality spaces through high-touch technical assistance coupled with philanthropic grants. In 2019, based on its demonstrated success, the State began investing in capacity building and quality improvement, and in 2023, this project transitioned to its current home at First Children's Finance. Since its inception through June 2025, Make Way for Kids has granted over **\$10.7M** to child care spaces, creating nearly 7,000 spaces in all 14 of Vermont's counties.

Sharing Our Impact

Our strategy over the past decade has integrated people power, program growth and sustainability, and policy change to build a stronger, more equitable child care system in Vermont. We engaged and mobilized communities through grassroots organizing, turning individual passion into collective power. At the same time, we partnered with early childhood educators and programs to implement sustainable, field-informed solutions. We worked closely with policymakers to build the political will needed to secure change. These efforts were anchored by bold policy advocacy — all to ensure quality, affordable child care for every Vermont family.

Vermont's Child Care Campaign and the passage of Act 76 have made Vermont a national leader on child care. This work offers a roadmap for organizations and activists in other communities who want to see increased public investment in their child care systems. We are committed to sharing with our partners around the country the story of what led to this transformational change in Vermont, the easy wins and the hurdles, the policy details that are having an impact, and the lessons we have learned along the way.

While this 10-year campaign is coming to an end, the transformational power of the change we've secured together will continue to have profound positive impacts on not just Vermont's children, families, and early childhood educators, but for communities across the country.

Vermont's Legacy

Our hope at Let's Grow Kids is that by sharing our story of Vermont's progress, we can inspire and accelerate progress for kids, families and early childhood educators across the country.

Key Campaign Takeaways

- Create urgency and accountability with a timeframe and clear goals
- Elevate the voices of those most impacted by the policy
- Invest in grassroots mobilization
- Engage employers as champions and advocates
- Lean into politics; policy won't change without it



The Work Continues

With the movement that we have built together and the framework and funding in place from Act 76, Let's Grow Kids as an organization will be officially winding down at the end of this year — but by no means is our work on child care complete. Families are still struggling to find and afford child care, programs are still facing staffing shortages, and child care deserts remain. We know the work isn't done, and that's why the movement keeps moving forward. Together with our system partners we have worked to shape the objectives for the coming year.

The next phase of the Child Care Campaign will focus on:

- **Protecting all public funding in Vermont's child care system**
- **Increasing affordability and access for families**
- **Strengthening the early childhood education workforce**



Leading the Next Chapter

Vermont's Child Care Campaign has benefited from the collaboration of several system partners and advocacy organizations. These partnerships have been critical to the success of the child care campaign. The organizations outlined below will build on the momentum of Act 76 and lead the next phase of the campaign. We hope you will stay connected with the campaign and engage with these incredible organizations as they move our shared vision forward.



The Let's Grow Kids Action Network (LGKAN) will continue advocating and lobbying for progress on child care in the state house and will support candidates in future elections who prioritize child care as a top issue.

letsgrowkidsactionnetwork.org



Building Bright Futures will remain focused on data tracking and statewide accountability.

buildingbrightfutures.org

First Children's Finance

First Children's Finance-Vermont will continue its system capacity support and child care program business and technical assistance.

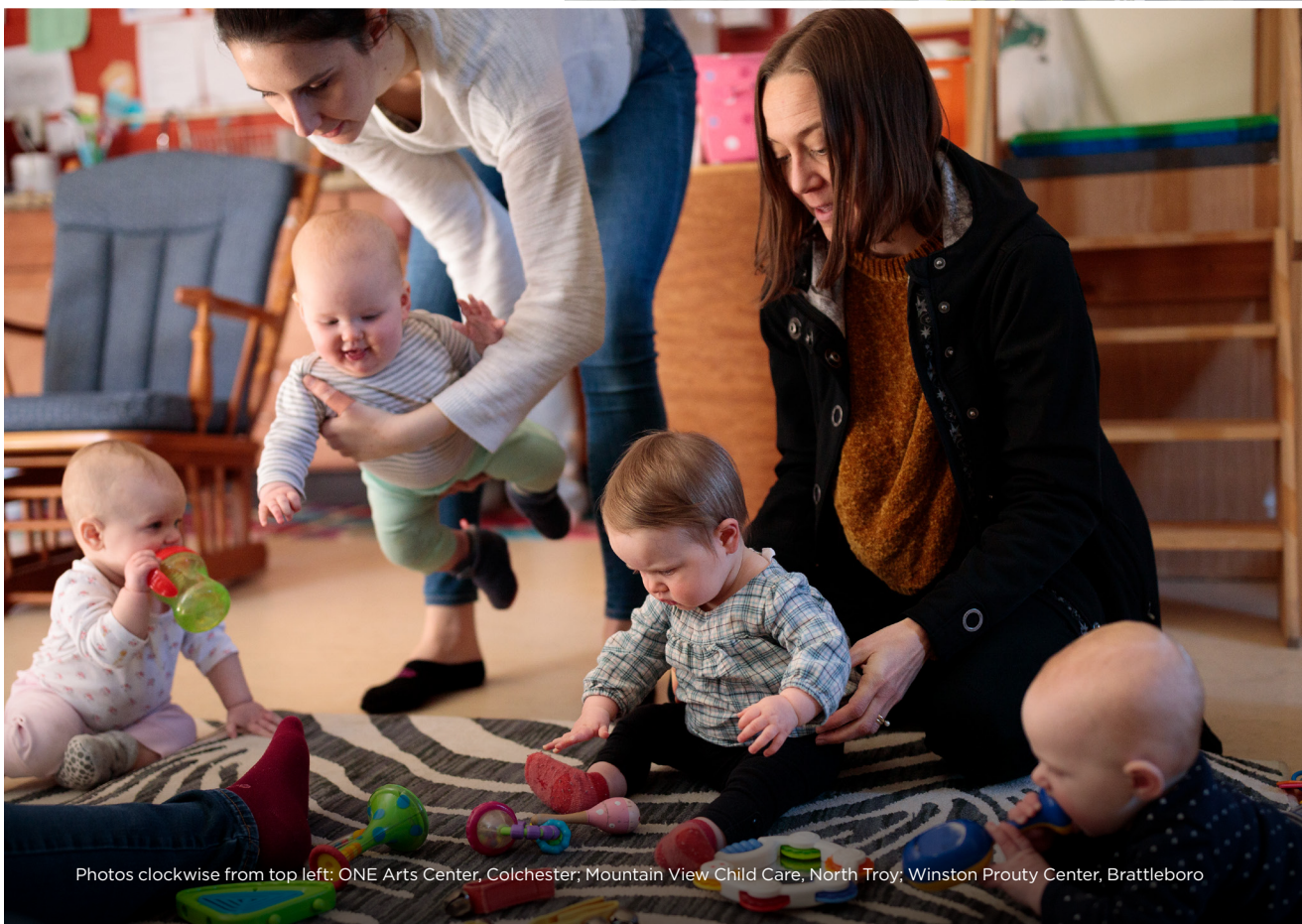
firstchildrensfinance.org/vermont



Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC) will continue supporting, growing, and advocating for the early childhood field.

vtaeyc.org



Photos clockwise from top left: ONE Arts Center, Colchester; Mountain View Child Care, North Troy; Winston Prouty Center, Brattleboro

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Front Cover photo: Otter Creek Child Center, Middlebury
Back Cover photo: King Street Center, Burlington

Vermont's Child Care Campaign

CHILD CARE IS ESSENTIAL.

Let's Grow Kids is sunsetting but Vermont's Child Care Campaign is here to stay! Scan the QR code with your camera app to stay connected with the movement:

LET'S GROW KIDS
Action Network



LetsGrowKidsActionNetwork.org



P.O Box 1234 | Montpelier, VT 05601
802-391-0981
info@lgkan.org

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