

# 2024 Annual Report



# Services

Whatcom Center for Early Learning's mission is to partner with families to provide high-quality, equitable, and comprehensive therapy and support services to children experiencing developmental delays and disabilities.

Every child deserves to feel safe, loved, and full of possibility. But too many little ones face challenges that dim their light before they've had a chance to shine. At WCEL, we walk beside children and families, offering the care, support, and connection they need to heal, grow, and reach for the future they deserve.

Developmental Evaluations

Early Learning and School Readiness

Family Resource Coordination

Infant Mental Health Support

Language Interpretation

Nutrition & Feeding Therapy

Parent Connection

Play Groups with Caregivers

Physical & Occupational Therapy

Speech & Language Therapy





# Hello friends!



It has been such a fantastic year at WCEL walking alongside children and their families.


We have had 40% growth in the kids and families we serve in just the last 4 years. We now have more than 60 WCEL staff. WCEL has been building systems, infrastructure, staffing, and capacity to carry out our mission and grow our services.

WCEL has expanded outreach efforts increasing the number of children experiencing marginalized identities benefiting from our programs. We have also been providing regular training for WCEL staff to better understand the sociopolitical context that shapes bias, privilege, and the needs and experiences of diverse populations to forward disability justice, forge strong connections, and provide equitable services.

We now serve around 300 children and families a month through our Early Support Program, and hundreds of additional children in our Early Learning Program in five locations. We have provided in-home therapy, care coordination, and family support this year through 5,652 visits. In 2024, we also grew our mental health program. Our infant mental health therapists provide therapeutic interventions to support caregiver capacity to understand and meet the emotional and social needs of the child. We have also spearheaded a language access project working with partners to build the medical interpreter workforce for our county and supporting children and families that with quality interpretation services.

As funding has been more challenging, we ask that you consider becoming a monthly donor and supporting the youngest members of our community at a key time in their lives when 85% of brain development is taking place. Your monthly contribution will allow WCEL to comprehensively support families and continue to transform the lives of children and their caregivers.

Thank you,  
Sierra James  
Executive Director



# 2024 Numbers

5,652

Early Support visits supporting child development & caregiver empowerment

90%

of families receiving Early Support services report that WCEL helps their child develop and grow (as opposed to 86% other statewide agencies)

582

Early support service referrals processed

630

families engaged with child development specialists & peer support through our Early Learning Program

13

new staff welcomed to the WCEL team

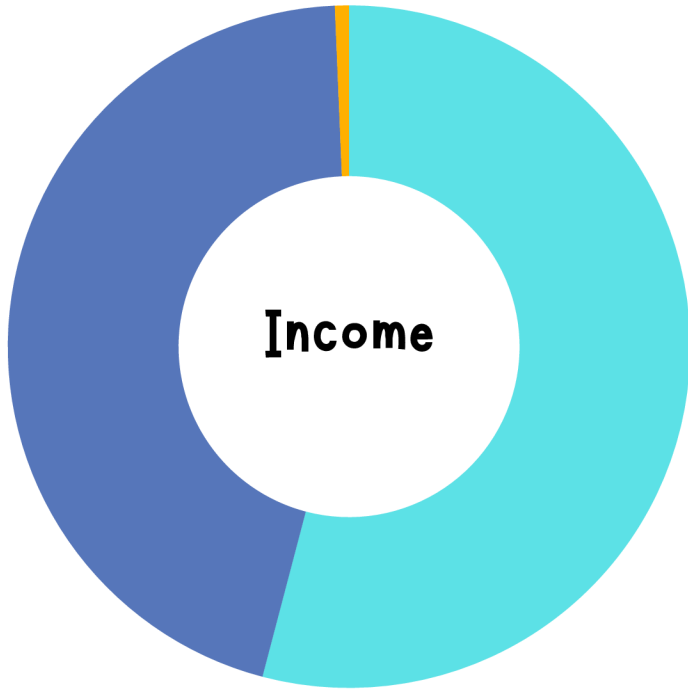
37%

of families identified as BIPOC in our Early Support Services

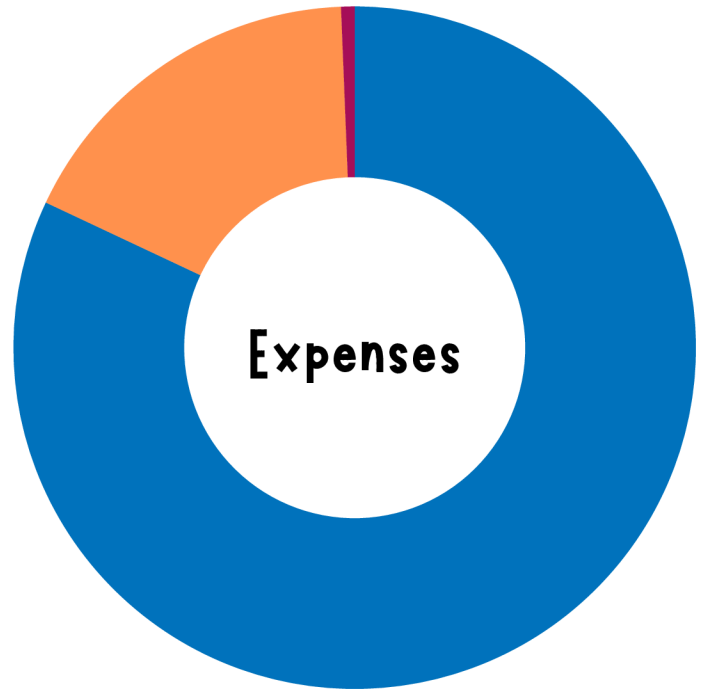


# Financials

WCEL operating budget for 2024 - 2025: \$5.5 million



- Program Income - 54%
- Grants - 45%
- Other Income - 1%



- Program Services - 82%
- Management & General - 17%
- Fundraising - 1%



# Family Spotlight

Faten and Hussam were thrilled to tell their son, Omar, and his grandmother that they were expecting a baby girl. With their hearts filled with joy, the growing family found a bigger apartment and welcomed baby Aya on a warm day in July.

Aya developed much like her brother until, at 18 months, a routine check-up raised developmental concerns. Their doctor recommended the SEAS line, connecting them with Whatcom Center for Early Learning. Family Resource Coordinator Julia visited the family and confirmed Aya's eligibility for services.

Faten and Hussam hesitated, questioning if early support services were right for Aya and worrying about labels and stigma: this approach was unfamiliar to the culture they were raised in. Relatives urged them to wait, believing Aya might outgrow these challenges.

*Would this process or these labels become a barrier to future success, or invite pity or shame?* Faten and Hussam wondered.



Aya

Faten explained, "My only concern was for Aya. I believed in Aya and her abilities, and I only wanted her to get the help she needed so she could have opportunities and success in her life. No matter what, I needed to know, so that I could help her. I did not want to be left wondering or waiting until she was older, possibly regretting the decision."

Aya began weekly early support services in her home with Specialized Instructor Erin and attended WCEL playgroups at the Big Blue House. Aya's progress was gradual — her speech improved, but social interactions were difficult.

Faten remained dedicated to ensuring Aya practiced at home and attended playgroups regularly. At three, Aya transitioned to the Meridian School District with WCEL's support. Her family invested their budget in private speech therapy, and though they worried about long school days, Aya adjusted well with supportive teachers.

Aya gained new skills, and by fourth grade, she no longer needed an IEP. Her handwriting and reading improved—she even learned cursive, to her parents' delight. She devoured chapter books, wrote imaginative stories, and memorized multiplication tables on her own. "She accomplished far beyond what we thought possible," Faten shared.

During the pandemic, the family welcomed Karam. As he neared three, Faten noticed speech differences and, remembering Aya's journey, sought early support from WCEL without hesitation. With Speech-Language Pathologist Alex visiting twice a month, Karam made great progress, loving playtime at Cordata.



Aya



Faten, Karam, & Alex

Faten encourages people who are deciding. "Don't hesitate or be concerned about calling WCEL sooner. You will feel much better because the concerns you see will make sense. The kids will be more comfortable, and you will learn more ways to properly help them at home. You can skip all the anxiety and wondering and have experts helping out. Our kids come first, and everyone deserves the help they need."

Now four, Karam is energetic and always on the move, loving cars, tag, and singing. He's in Head Start with the Bellingham School District. Aya, now eleven, is a kind, sensitive girl who cherishes friendships. Faten also shared that now, after watching Aya's experience, when her family members have children who need help, they are more inclined to try support services.

**"Our kids come first,  
and everyone deserves  
the help they need"**



Karam

# Funders

**We are deeply grateful to our grant funders for believing in our mission and investing in brighter futures.**

- BECU
- Bellingham Sunrise Rotary Club
- Boeing
- Chuckanut Health Foundation
- Dan Thompson Memorial Fund via DDA
- Developmental Disabilities Administration
- Eleanor & Henry Jansen Foundation
- First Federal Foundation
- Haggen Foundation
- M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust
- Mount Baker Foundation
- Norcliffe Foundation
- Tulalip Foundation
- United Way of Whatcom County
- WA State DCYF- ESIT Program
- WECU
- Whatcom Community Foundation
- Whatcom County Health & Community Services
- Whatcom County Healthy Children's Fund
- Yield Giving



 360.671.3660

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