



**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning Ontario

**2022  
Annual  
Report**



# Leading with Vision



Amanda Stevens,  
Chair, Board of Directors

In early 2022, pandemic recovery and the potential for sector-wide expansion and structural change had great influence on the child care sector.

With this in mind, the board of directors, with input from stakeholders, developed and launched a new strategic plan. Built with the need for resilience, sustainability, and flexibility there are three strategic priorities:

1. Influence early learning and child care system planning
2. Enable sustainable growth within an expanding system
3. Ensure a flourishing team

Diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism (DEIA) are seen as foundational to achieving our goals.

Throughout 2022, the volunteer board of directors met regularly for risk assessment, planning and strategy adjustment. The board once again approved COVID-specific child absence credits and employee sick days for 2022 to support equity and reduce the spread of illness within programs.

In late March, Ontario signed the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) Agreement. As a long-time advocate for universal child care, RisingOaks Early Learning collaborated with system managers, joined planning tables, engaged with government and provided leadership to address sector concerns. On September 24, RisingOaks' application to join CWELCC was approved. Retroactive fee rebates for children up to age six rolled out to

parents in November. On December 31, fees were reduced by 52.75%, with further reductions, to an average of \$10/day, planned by September 2025. Despite reduced fees, RisingOaks Early Learning continues to provide the same high-quality care that families have come to expect and trust.

By summer 2022, it was clear that attention must turn to addressing the workforce crisis, with retention as a first priority. In the fall, when approving the 2023 budget, the board made extraordinary investments in our workforce, related to compensation and decent work. Senior leadership continues their advocacy work with associations, government and regulatory bodies - such as the College of Early Childhood Educators - to identify root causes, emerging risks and opportunities.

On behalf of the board of directors, I invite you to become a [member](#) of RisingOaks Early Learning - if you're not already - and hope you can join us at our virtual [Annual General Meeting \(AGM\)](#) on April 11, 2023.





## Board of Directors

Amanda Stevens | Chair  
Alisha Michiels | Vice Chair  
Jessica Ronzio | Secretary  
Jennifer Tieu | Treasurer  
Blessing Akpan | Director  
Erin Mikha | Director  
Julia Bloom | Director

Julia Klann | Director  
Karen McIlroy | Past Chair  
Paul Okoye | Director  
Robert MacDonald | Director  
Lori Prospero | CEO\*  
\* ex-officio

**Thank you for your dedication and service to RisingOaks Early Learning!**

“The gift of service leads to a life of love.” - Mary White

**“An incredible centre, highly focused on child development and inclusivity. Educators here care about the children so deeply. My 3.5 year old is frequently talking about her experiences at preschool, her teachers, and the children she’s become close friends with. To see your child demonstrate confidence and shine in a space that aligns with our parenting philosophies is a blessing and we are so thankful for this space.”**

**– Kristin, RisingOaks’ Parent**



**Every  
Child  
is an  
ARTIST**



# Rising Strong: Building Resilience, Momentum and Growth



**Lori Prospero, CAE**  
Chief Executive Officer

If 2021 was the year of overcoming obstacles and thriving through the pandemic, 2022 was focused on resilience and building forward momentum. COVID-19 continued to ebb and flow throughout the year. In January, school-age children had a 2-week program closure to help curb the spread of COVID-19. New protocols for screening, masking and isolation were implemented. By March, after two long-years, we finally welcomed parents back into our buildings for drop-off and pick-up. We prioritized health and safety – keeping mandatory mask and vaccination requirements in place into the spring and fall. The RisingOaks Early Learning board of directors approved extraordinary measures in the form of COVID-19 child absence credits and COVID-specific sick days for employees.

In response to the new strategic plan, an operational plan and budget was established to support achievement of our new priorities.

## **Influence System Planning**

With the coming of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWLECC) program, RisingOaks was well positioned to lead and influence planning. Senior leaders joined the region's CWELCC budgeting and workforce strategy working groups to help inform local implementation planning. Meetings with ministerial staff, MPs and MPPs focused on concrete actions to

support the workforce and roll-out of CWELCC.

To further support government relations, RisingOaks Early Learning applied to join the Quality Early Learning Network (QELN) - a non-partisan network of multi-site, community-based agencies that collaborates with public decision-makers to ensure that every child and family in Ontario can access a system of high-quality, affordable early learning and care services.

## **Enable Sustainable Growth**

With Ontario's promise of 86,000 new spaces by 2026, RisingOaks opened its' newest centre in September 2022 and updated its expansion feasibility study, with support from an Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) Resilient Communities Grant. Six possible expansion areas were identified: Waterloo, Peel, Halton, London/County of Middlesex, Stratford, Haldimand/Norfolk. Our strategy remains focused on school-based

expansion at this time. In meeting with other regions, RisingOaks is setting the foundation - building relationships and awareness of regional planning approaches in relation to notional space targets set by the Ministry. New data points have also been established to monitor our capacity to grow without affecting the quality of existing programs.



## Ensure a Flourishing Team

The global pandemic shined a light on burnout, with many employees – including the child care workforce – reflecting on priorities, workload and work-life balance. RisingOaks continued its work to build a culture of wellness. Leadership development, coaching, and staff workshops on appreciation vs. recognition, leading above the line, Prosilient Problem-Solving™, self-care, True Colours™, and work smarter-not harder - along with a Wellness Retreat in the fall, were key to improvements in our WorkWell and Net Promoter Scores. Other projects in the works include: enhanced orientation for new employees, creation of a training video library, and development of a strategic HR growth plan.

In the fall, a working group was formed to support workload analysis, identifying key targets for workload management, gathering data from the centres, and making recommendations for action that will mitigate the risk of burnout. This group will report back in the Spring of 2023.

Like many organizations, we have turned our gaze internally. As a registered charity, our Mission speaks about giving parents peace of mind, and our values include community and love, but we

know that internal and external systemic barriers exist. We have blind spots and lack the expertise or lived experience to recognize them and address them well. As such, we hired Credence & Co., a local consulting firm. Credence, in consultation with an internal Reference Group, has conducted a review of current RisingOaks' policies, programs, and partnerships with the aim of identifying barriers related to diversity, equity, inclusion and/or racism experienced by employees, RisingOaks' families and volunteers. The report from this organizational review is on the agenda for the upcoming Annual General Meeting.

Fiscal year 2022 set the foundation for growth – personal, professional and organizational. Despite the sector-wide staffing challenges, thanks to the dedication of every team and board member, we accomplished a lot and set the stage for key initiatives to take place in 2023. In addition, RisingOaks Early Learning remains a place where discovery becomes second nature; we believe that every child has the right to thrive. Our educators are experts in setting a foundation for lifelong learning for each and every child. We know that early learning, play-based experiences create well-rounded, healthy people as they grow and make their mark on the world.





**“Thank you to our wonderful educators! You are all so kind, compassionate, creative and patient with our children. It is always such a comfort knowing that when we leave our children in your hands, they are loved and safe :) Thank you for all of your hard work and know that it does not go unnoticed.**

**- Hilary, RisingOaks' Parent**

# Our Values in Practice



Kristine Parsons, RECE  
Director of Operations



As an organization, RisingOaks Early Learning has a set of core values: **creativity, learning, community, advocacy** and **love**. These values are embedded in the work of each employee. Our values are visible and upheld in all that we do.

Beyond our core values, educators individually bring additional values to their daily practice. These values are most visible in the learning environment that educators create and encourage throughout the day. Educators share a vision into their values through their curriculum. You can see their values represented in their written daily, weekly and monthly documentation.

Children also help shape the learning curriculum. As keen observers, educators pay attention to and reflect on what the children are telling us they value through their engagement with the materials that are available to them.

An educator that values exploration will set the environment up such that the children have a variety of materials available to them. There is no prescribed or desired outcome for the activity. Rather, the children are empowered to freely explore the materials set out. Children sometimes use only those materials provided, or they may add additional classrooms materials to enhance their exploration.

Here we observe a child using a rubber mallet to crush many colours of chalk. In the background we also see a bowl, muffin tin and some metal scoops. When educators value exploration, we are likely to see this situation play out where the children take the crushed chalk to the bowl, mix



the colours together and fill the muffin tins. This activity may move to imaginary play if the children are developmentally ready for associative or cooperative play. This may lead to serving up rainbow chalk muffins. Or this play may take another twist where the children mix the powdered chalk with water, and voilà, our chalk turns to face paint

When we think about how values fit into the curriculum and how the children will spend their day, a teaching team serves as a great benefit. Not every educator will value rough and tumble play or messy, explorative, creative play.

Not every educator will create an environment where a toddler is free to use a paint-covered sponge to paint themselves from head to toe. Being able to cover yourself in this cool, slippery, thick material gives you a whole new perspective on paint.

As educators, we develop our values throughout our career. What we value may have developed throughout our own childhood. These values were likely shaped long before we knew what they were. Or, we may have happened upon the idea of a value as we connected with others in the profession. In our professional training, we begin to reflect on what we value and how this may show up in the work we do. We dream about the possibilities of our work and the learning environment that we wish to create for the children who attend our programs. However, and perhaps most important, we also stay flexible within our environments, because we trust the children to show us what they value.





Every

Child

is an

ARTIST

By: Alexander & Matthew

By: Leo.P & Arist

By: Mason & Westley

**“Thank you for keeping our kids safe & helping them grow!”**  
- Melissa, RisingOaks' Parent



# Treasurer's Report



**Jennifer Tieu**  
Treasurer, CPA, CMA

On behalf of the board of directors, I am pleased to report that the board has approved the 2022 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, 2022, 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 2022 budget projected a deficit of \$717,000 due to the on-going pandemic recovery. The board of directors anticipated lower enrolment with a reduction in revenues, and increased expenses in staff and supply costs.

Reflecting on 2022 results, post-pandemic enrolment continues to increase year-over-year, however school-age remains well below pre-pandemic levels based on changing neighbourhood demographics and remote work opportunities. Despite this, 2022 was a year of change and adaptation; RisingOaks opened its newest centre, RisingOaks Early Learning | Oak Creek, made the difficult decision to close six youth development before and after school programs in response to the workforce crisis, and worked diligently to assess the financial and operational impacts that the ever-evolving Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) system will have on the organization.

Revenue from child care services was up \$1.5 million, though grants to support pandemic recovery were down significantly. We were thankful to receive one-time funding of \$470,000 from the Region of Waterloo. Included in this is a portion towards first-time equipping costs for Oak Creek, with the balance covered by Ministry of Education funding via the Waterloo Region District School Board. Funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation – in the amount of \$90,000, was used to support capacity building, leadership development and workplace wellness initiatives. Thanks to strong fiscal management and some unexpected funding, RisingOaks ended the year with a surplus of \$227,806.

RisingOaks Early Learning remains committed to the development and well-being of children and staff. The board of directors maintains several internally restricted funds to support our mission. At year-end 2022, the board approved increased allocations to several funds, including increasing the Playground Improvement Fund to \$1.1 million. This investment will support the final three playground renovations and ongoing maintenance costs for 2023 and beyond. Natural playgrounds support child development through nature-based education.

Your board of directors remains committed to monitoring RisingOaks' financial stability and liquidity as the landscape of early childhood education and care continues to change for the better.

Fiscal Year	Total Revenue	Total Expense	Surplus/ Deficit	Notes
2022 Actual	\$11,268,597	\$11,040,791	\$227,806	Approximately \$2.2M was received in CWELCC funding for fee reduction (Nov & Dec), and retroactive fee rebates (Apr 1 to Oct 31, 2022).
2022 Budget	\$9,564,593	\$10,282,063	(\$717,471)	A budget deficit was approved in anticipation of increasing costs due to inflation but limited government funding supports known at the time of approval.
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

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

1 new child care centre  
(now 9 in total)

2,829 program hours

1,346 children served

1,133 families served

2,723 weekly camp  
enrolments



Canada-Wide  
Early Learning and Child Care  
(CWELCC)

\$1,131,207 issued in fee rebates

Fees reduced by 52.75% for children  
birth to age 6 as of December 31, 2022



# By the Numbers

279 staff

34% new hires

39 placement students

20 board & committee volunteers



2 playground renovations

352 learning stories  
shared in our monthly e-news





**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning

# Locations

## John Sweeney

185 Activa Avenue  
Kitchener, Ontario N2E 4A1  
519-742-6291  
johnsweeney@RisingOaks.ca

## Saint John Paul II

75 Pebblecreek Drive  
Kitchener, Ontario N2A 0E3  
519-894-0563  
sjp@RisingOaks.ca

## Lincoln Road

145 Lincoln Road  
Waterloo, Ontario N2J 2N8  
519-746-1124  
lincoln@RisingOaks.ca

## St. Luke

550 Chesapeake Drive  
Waterloo, Ontario N2K 4G5  
519-747-0054  
stluke@RisingOaks.ca

## Oak Creek

80 Tartan Avenue  
Kitchener, Ontario N2R 1R7  
519-893-7529  
oakcreek@RisingOaks.ca

## St. Matthew

405 Pastern Trail  
Waterloo, Ontario N2K 3V6  
519-885-0512  
stmatthew@RisingOaks.ca

## Our Lady of Fatima

55 Hammet Street  
Cambridge, Ontario N3C 2H5  
519-220-1148  
olf@RisingOaks.ca

## St. Nicholas

525 Laurelwood Drive  
Waterloo, Ontario N2V 2N1  
519-883-1998  
stnicholas@RisingOaks.ca

## St. Brigid

50 Broom Street  
Ayr, Ontario N0B 1E0  
519-394-2273  
stbrigid@RisingOaks.ca

## Administration Office

2-10 Washburn Drive  
Kitchener, ON N2R 1S2  
519-894-0581  
info@RisingOaks.ca

